'THE LADYE NANCYE'

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'DAME DURDEN'

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May Dunne
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Emily Lincoln
From my old friend Fannie
Sept 1st 1887

'THE LADYE NANCYE.'

Mary Dunne
August 11th - 1911.

'THE LADYE NANCYE.'

A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

'DAME DURDEN,' 'MY LORD CONCEIT,'
'DARBY AND JOAN,'
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

It may be argued that the introduction of Mysticism and Psychology in a novel is out of place. The growing importance, however, of these subjects, as well as a firm belief in the phenomena of Psychic Force, induces the author to plead for the strange creation of the Woman in Black. Magnetic influences and magnetic cures are now acknowledged truths, and truths to which science and philosophy are lending their best energies. The power of affecting others by the will of a stronger physical and mental organization is receiving as much attention

as any other discovery that has surprised the world. When mystery is disrobed, and, instead of scoffing, meets with the calm investigation given to known laws and ascertained facts, it ceases to be mysterious. It may even become a recognised and useful agent in some of those strange and torturing mental diseases that have again and again baffled human science and human skill. A change has overtaken the mind and feeling of the world at large: old superstitions, old theories, old ideas and prejudices have passed away, and new ones have taken their place. Magnetic and physiological treatment would have been looked upon as a species of the Black Art a century ago, and the susceptibility of any nature to such an influence as mesmerism would have simply resulted in fiendish persecution on the part of relatives and friends. Fortunately, in these days no such harsh treatment need be dreaded. The shafts of

ridicule and the scorn of incredulity are the only forms of modern persecution, but they are powerful only in the hands of the investigator. As a rule, they are wielded chiefly by the scoffer and the sceptic, who have never given even an hour's serious consideration to subjects which certainly demand it. Nature holds her own secrets, nor yields them save to the careful and patient investigator. The despot fears the overthrow of his pride; the theorist dreads the calm, clear judgment that can sweep away probabilities like cobwebs, and prove beyond dispute the shallowness of the most poetic supposition. The captious, the acute, and the logical have each and all their own special principle to defend. But to the liberal-minded, the unbiassed, and the painstaking no subject is too trivial for examination, no leaf of Nature's Primer too alphabetically simple to be ignored.

Nothing is more strange than the diversity of human intellect, which, though acknowledged to emanate from one Source, flows into a thousand channels of belief, theorism, and scepticism. But because one mind believes what another rejects, it is unfair to say one is right and the other wrong. Each has received its own capacity, and is left free to exercise or control it. The rash and hasty judgment of one human being upon the faith or conduct of another has always seemed to me a thing to be deplored as well as condemned. The wisest intellect may sometimes learn an unsuspected truth from the simplest; and to denounce in hasty, imperative, and unjust fashion against a newly advanced opinion is only another form of obstinacy or self-conceit.

The science of medicine has been entirely revolutionized, and the doctrine of theology may share a similar fate.

There is nothing impossible in a human creature voluntarily living the life I have described, any more than it would be impossible for a monk, or a nun, or a hermit to choose isolation in preference to the haunts of men. The curious development of magnetic force, and its special effect upon an unusually sensitive nature, are also coincidences that do not need to quit the region of facts, or require support from testimony, though such testimony is producible. As a rule people believe either too much or too little. There is another class who believe nothing at all. I feel I can safely leave my characters to the tender mercies of all three.

THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

BOOK I.

PAGE

MYSTERY - - - - - - - - - 1

BOOK II.

PAIN - - - - - - - - - - 44

BOOK III.

PENANCE - - - - - - - - - 158

'THE LADYE NANCYE.'

BOOK I.

MYSTERY.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY TOLD BY MRS. DEBORAH CLITHEROE, HOUSEKEEPER AT OWL'S ROOST, IN THE SERVICE OF ERROL GLENDENNING, ESQ.

I HAVE been asked by Mrs. Freere to relate, as succinctly and clearly as possible, my knowledge of certain facts relating to the mystery of Owl's Roost—the mystery of my master's strange marriage, and its still stranger results.

I am getting on in years now, but, thank Heaven, my memory is good, and my powers

of thinking and reasoning not deficient. When I told Mrs. Freere all I knew, she asked me if it were not possible for me to put it together in the form of a narrative, so as to join in with her own later acquaintance of the sad history. I agreed very readily. My time is none too fully occupied, and the forcible presentiment of late in my mind, that some day my testimony may be of service, has conspired to further my efforts. I wish to try if it is possible—in writing—to put down the series of perplexing, melancholy, and sorrowful events that have so affected my dear master's fate, and fallen with so sombre a darkness and mystery around his ancestral home.

To begin with, I have lived in the service of the Glendennings, of Owl's Roost, since I was a mere slip of a girl of fifteen. The old Squire was alive then, and his wife also. A proud, cold, managing lady she was, and not very much liked. They had two sons, Philip and Errol. Mr. Philip was the mortal image of his mother in everything—

looks, temper, and pride. Mr. Errol was quite different—dreamy, gentle, kind of heart—for all the world like the old Squire. From his birth his mother treated him quite differently to Mr. Philip. All of love or tenderness that so cold and proud a lady could show, she gave to her eldest born. It was not fair or right, I often thought, but mothers have these fancies.

When Mr. Errol was about two years old, there happened to him that sad and cruel accident, which, to my thinking, altered his whole life and nature. He and his brother were playing together in the gallery overlooking the staircase, when some childish dispute arose. Mr. Philip was high and haughty even then, and he struck his baby-brother across the face. Mr. Errol did not cry, but his little face grew scarlet, and he seized Mr. Philip and kicked him several times. It was a childish quarrel, and a childish burst of passion; but it happened that their mother was just then crossing the gallery to the great staircase, and saw them.

I saw them, too, but before I could reach their side, she had seized the little fellow, and with her riding-whip she struck him heavily across his back. He struggled out of her grasp—they were close to the staircase by then—his foot slipped, and he fell down the whole flight of stairs. I felt sick with horror. I seemed rooted to the spot. At last I ran forward and looked down. The child was sobbing in his father's arms.

The scene comes before me, even after all these years, like a picture. The haughty lady standing at the top of that staircase, dressed in her riding-habit, and with the whip held tight in her clenched hand, and that awful look of white, set passion on her face, and there below, looking up at her in pale and shocked reproach, the noble figure of the grey-haired Squire, with that little bruised and sobbing figure clasped in his arms.

His mother came slowly down the steps at last. It seemed to me as if only a sense of duty prompted the inquiry: 'Is he hurt?'

Her husband never answered. He carried the little fellow to the nursery, and I followed. My lady went out for her ride alone.

We undressed him, and there seemed no sign of hurt on him, except the cruel mark across his little back where the whip had struck him.

When I saw the look of agony on his father's face as he pressed his white and shaking lips to that place, I thought it was strange that only women are credited with tenderness.

The child soon ceased to cry, and his father took him out with him on the big black horse that both the boys knew and loved so well. I cannot, of course, say whether he spoke to my lady or not; but if he did, it made no difference in her coldness to the child.

A year after that, I first began to notice that the boy's back was not quite straight, and I spoke to the Squire at once. The child was taken up to London and seen by

the cleverest physicians there. After that, most of his boyhood was spent bound down to an invalid's couch. All the gaiety, and fun, and frolic, and mischief of his sex and years were denied him; but to compensate for that, he had all the devotion and love of his father. My lady seldom came near him. Perhaps his presence was a reproach to her. He had his own rooms, his own attendants; he had books, toys, and every ingenious device to while away his hours of confinement; and perhaps both mother and brother thought that he ought to be satisfied.

He was always most patient and gentle. But I think that life sobered and saddened him, and gave to his character a shy and sensitive reticence, which kept him lonely then, and keeps him lonely still.

I fear I am wandering somewhat in my story. Memories carry me back instead of forward, and I forgot that my intention was to write of my master as he is, not drift into reminiscences of his childhood.

The years brought changes. My lady died

quite suddenly of a chill, caught at a county ball. Then Mr. Philip, who was at college, was upset into the river while making one of a boating-party, and drowned. It was a great blow to the old Squire; but he and Mr. Errol lived on quietly here for five or six years more. Then the old Squire died, sitting quietly in his chair in the library, and Mr. Errol was left alone.

He was about eight-and-twenty then, but he looked much older. The deformity had almost passed away, save for a slight stoop in the shoulders. His face was delicate, thoughtful, refined, but not strikingly handsome. He was very studious. He lived almost entirely among books, and such friends and guests as came to see him were all scholarly or scientific men.

Owl's Roost was very, very lonely in those days. My husband was butler, and I had been given the post of housekeeper. Mr. Errol gave no entertainments, and no ladies ever came near the place.

Even at its best the house had been

dreary. It was very dark, and very, very old. It was near enough to the sea-coast for the swell and roar of the waves to be heard in any storm; it was closely shut in by trees; and in one of the oldest portions was a ruined turret, where from time immemorial had dwelt the race of melancholy night-birds who had given to the house and property the name of 'Owl's Roost.'

There was a tradition about them, of course. The luck of the race was connected with the life and succession of these uncanny tenants. When the one was broken so would be the other—at least, that was the popular superstition.

The intense quiet and dreariness of the life there seemed to deepen as the years went by. Mr. Errol, as by force of habit I called him still, was more like a man of middle age, than one who should have been in the prime of youth and strength.

The only thing that for long broke the monotony of this life was the arrival of two boys—sons of some distant cousin who had

left the children to Mr. Errol's guardianship. For some years they ran wild about the place, and I will give them credit for waking it up. We all adored them, and I am afraid spoilt them, too.

The eldest, Mr. Basil, was over twelve years old when Mr. Errol, whose health had for long been very delicate, was ordered by the doctor to spend a winter abroad. He arranged then for the boys to go to the rector's every day to be instructed as he thought fit, and left Owl's Roost to the joint care of my husband and myself.

All that winter we heard but once from the Squire, and that was to say he was at Nice, and enjoying much better health.

The cold, bitter weather was just breaking up, and a few buds and shoots were visible on the trees, when a telegram came that fell, so to speak, like a bombshell among us all. It said:

'*I was married in London this morning. We are coming straight to Owl's Roost. Have all in readiness for your mistress.*'

That was so like a man, and a man who had lived a bachelor's life for more than thirty years.

Carpets were to be put down, beds aired, furniture cleaned, and rooms arranged, all in a few hours' time, and without any previous warning!

However, we all set to work, and made the old place look as well as we could, and what with fires and lights, and one thing and another, the hall and the library looked very well.

We did not touch the great drawing-room. There was no time, and we knew it would scarcely be needed. I was full of curiosity to see my new mistress, and well-nigh mazed with wonder at the thought of Mr. Errol being married, and so sudden.

I told the young gentlemen, and had them nicely dressed in their Sunday clothes, and begged them to be on their best behaviour—not that they ever had any 'best' so far as I could judge. However, they were fairly good, and had settled themselves and their

dogs on the rug before the great fire in the hall, when the carriage drew up. My husband was ready to open the door, and I stood just behind to welcome my lady.

The light from the blazing fire fell full on her as she stepped into the hall. I quite started. She was so wonderfully beautiful, and yet so strange to look at. If she had been carved out of marble she could scarcely have been whiter, and her eyes were so large and so solemn they made me feel afraid. She threw off her heavy travelling mantle, and went up to the fire. She was dressed all in white, some thick, soft stuff, with black velvet bands at her throat and wrist, and she looked like a spirit more than a woman. The boys sprang up, and stood staring at her. They never even noticed their guardian, till he spoke. He had shaken hands warmly with me as I bade him welcome home, and then he went up to his wife, and laying his hands on her shoulders, turned her face towards the boys.

'My dear,' he said, 'these are the young

wards I told you about. Won't you speak to them?'

She looked at the two young, startled faces, and then put out her hand in a timid, appealing way.

'I hope,' she said, in a low, even voice, and with a certain hesitation and formality of speech, that made me think she must be foreign, 'I hope we shall be good friends.'

Mr. Stewart hung his head and said nothing. Mr. Basil, always the leading spirit in everything, took her hand at once, and said, with a graciousness I could scarcely have expected:

'I hope so, too. I don't see why we shouldn't. Only I hope you don't mind larks.'

'Larks?' she echoed.

She looked in a puzzled sort of way at her husband, and then at the boy. Her calm blue eyes would have seemed cold, had it not been for the wonderful shadow and softness of their long black lashes. The effect of that colouring on the marble-white face gave it a

strange and fascinating beauty. I saw Mr. Errol's glance rest on it with passionate admiration. He smiled at her.

'Basil means fun, riot, and recklessness, I fancy,' he said. 'But he must learn to alter his boisterous amusements now that there is a lady in the house.'

She did not answer her husband's glance. She looked at the bold, handsome, boyish face, and faintly smiled.

'He must not alter anything,' she said in that slow, measured way, as if the English words and the English phrasing were yet strange to her. 'I should not wish it. There is so little time, after all, that one is young.'

A shadow crossed her face, her eyes drooped. I noted then how sad a face it was, and what lines of trouble were about the tremulous lips. Mr. Basil looked at her with fervent admiration :

'I think you're a brick !' he said, and then drew back and stood beside his brother.

I knew by his face and his words that he

was her devoted champion henceforth. I stepped forward then.

'Would you like to go to your room, madam?' I said, and took up her heavy travelling-cloak from the chair where she had thrown it.

She assented eagerly.

'I am very tired,' she said to her husband; 'I shall rest till dinner-time, if you do not mind.'

'Pray do,' he answered, with that gentle courtesy of manner I knew so well. 'Mrs. Clitheroe will see to your comfort, I am sure. We need not dine for an hour yet, if you prefer it.'

'I should prefer it,' she said, and then followed me up the great oak staircase to the room prepared for her.

It was always a gloomy room, that state bedchamber at Owl's Roost. Not all the glow of fire and candles seemed to make it cheerful, and I noticed that my lady shuddered as she glanced round. The wind had risen, too, and was sobbing in a

fitful, moaning way around the dreary old house.

She listened for a moment, standing by the hearth, with her dress held back a little from her pretty arched feet.

'Does it always make that sound?' she asked.

'Yes,' I said. It was the truth, and I knew she would have to get used to the sound like the rest of us.

'It is very dreary here,' she said, and again she shuddered, and her face seemed to grow white and cold in a set, hopeless way. 'I did not know it was so dreary. I come from France, you know.'

'I did not know, madam,' I said. 'My master only to-day, telegraphed he was married.'

'You—you must have been surprised,' she said, bending her white face down to the flames.

'We were all surprised,' I answered; 'but very pleased. He has been alone so long—so very long.'

But in my heart I thought—why had he married a half-foreign woman of all women, and one so beautiful, and so young, and so strange?

'He is very good,' she said presently; and then, looking at her, I saw the tears standing on those wonderful lashes. 'Very—very good. I should have been quite friendless and homeless but for him.'

I wondered greatly to hear her speak like that, but I made no remark. I removed her hat, and saw then what wonderful hair framed in that lovely face—not gold, or fair, or brown, but a rich and burnished tint, the like of which I had never seen. It waved back naturally from her low, smooth brow, and little rings and tendrils of it clung like threads of gold about her ears and temples. Her beauty amazed me more and more. She was slightly made and of average height—not too tall or too short. All her movements were graceful, if somewhat languid. I thought that night that sorrow and fatigue had depressed and unnerved her. I only learnt

later what terrible sorrow she had undergone. I moved about. I opened her travelling-bag, and put out such things as she would require, and brought her hot water, and did all I could to make her comfortable. Then, remembering she had said she wished to rest, I asked her if I should leave her.

Her eyes were still fixed on the fire. She sighed wearily.

'Yes,' she said, with a nervous look around. 'It is a dreadful room,' she added. 'That bed looks like a funeral vault, and every corner is full of lurking shadows. Are all your famous English mansions like this?'

I felt hurt. The dignity of the family was called in question by this young and ignorant foreign girl. It did not seem right or fitting.

'Few are so old and so famous,' I told her proudly, but I saw her shudder again, and felt hopeless of her power to keep up that family dignity, or even appreciate it. I made my obeisance and left the room.

My master still stood by the fire, the boys

on either side of him talking eagerly and gaily. He turned quickly as he heard my step.

'Well, Deborah,' he said gaily, 'I have taken you by storm, have I not? Were you very much astonished?'

As the words left his lips, he stopped like one in the act of listening. In the momentary hush of the wind I caught a sound—the sound of wheels dashing quickly up the avenue. I saw him hold up his hand as if to silence me. The next instant the bell awoke a hundred clanging echoes, and, as he heard the noise, his face grew white and stern, and full of wrath. He drew himself up, tall and stern, as if to confront an enemy or a judge.

The next instant the great door fell to with an ominous, hollow sound, and I heard my husband's voice announcing 'M. Pierre de Volens.'

CHAPTER II.

I SUPPOSE a greater contrast than that presented by the two men who now faced each other in that dim old hall could not easily be found.

The gentleman thus abruptly introduced was, to my thinking, the handsomest man it had ever been my lot to gaze upon. Tall and splendidly made, with haughty, clear-cut features, and the darkest of hair and eyes, he stood before my master, and eyed him like a wrathful and avenging spirit.

'Tell me,' he said, 'it is not true—you have not married her!'

'It is quite true,' said my master. He seemed to have forgotten my presence and the boys'.

I went up to them and drew them away.

'Come,' I said, 'this is no place for you.'

Mr. Stewart, with his usual pleasantness, was following me, but Mr. Basil refused to move.

'I'm going to hear what's the row,' he said in his favourite schoolboy phraseology. 'Perhaps they'll fight a duel. How jolly.'

I did not waste time trying to persuade him. I knew it would be of no use. I drew Mr. Stewart's hand within my arm and turned away. At the same moment a sound caught my ear. I looked up. I saw my lady in her white dress, with all that lovely burnished hair hanging loose to her feet, come flying down the steps.

'Pierre!' she cried, and her voice had such a ring of gladness, and love, and wonder in it, that it held me chained and spell-bound to the spot.

The stranger looked at her, then a very fire of fury and hatred seemed to flash into his face.

'Brute—dog!' he hissed; 'I could kill

you !' And his hand was at my master's throat.

With a faint cry of intense terror she flung herself between them. Not on the breast whose love and shelter she of right could claim ; not on the heart whose duty and affection were for ever her own ; but into the arms of that stranger whose presence had evoked this stormy scene.

He held her for a moment while her husband drew back and surveyed them both with a look the like of which I pray I may never see on a man's face again.

He saw the convulsive clasp of those meeting arms—he saw the agony of one face change to chill insensibility ; the passion of the other to the diabolical and thwarted fury of a fiend.

He saw, yet stood there silent, mastering with the strong, stern self-control of years, the storm of bitter and outraged feeling in his heart.

I shook in every limb with the terror and the pity that I felt. Mr. Stewart and I were

in a shadowy corner of the great hall, and I do not think anyone noticed us.

The strange gentleman was murmuring words in a foreign tongue over the pale, senseless form of my master's bride. Presently he led her to the chair by the fire. Her eyes were open now—she looked ghastly.

'Pierre,' she said faintly, 'you should not have come here. Did you not get my letter?'

'I did not believe it,' he said. 'Bitterly as your father hated me, I did not believe it.'

Mr. Errol stepped forward then.

'Sir,' he said coldly, 'your presence here is an intrusion. I have every reason to believe that M. de Forèze had good and justifiable reasons for wishing to part his daughter and yourself. I intend to obey his wishes in that matter. Permit me to remind you that this lady is my wife; this house mine. I will explain my motives to her for saying plainly I desire you to relieve both of your presence.'

The handsome face looked very evil now. He glanced irresolutely from the drooping

figure in the chair to the stern, cold face of my master.

'Is this your wish also, Nancette?' he said.

'Yes, Pierre—yes,' she answered faintly. 'I told you we ought never to meet again. I told you of my father's dying wish. It is too late. Go—go your way and forget me!'

He drew back; he looked first at one face, then at the other.

'I go,' he said slowly and distinctly, and the light in his eyes grew lurid and evil. 'But I shall not forget you, Nancette—nor you, monsieur,' turning sharply on my master. 'You have played your game well—so far. But there may be other cards in my hand. Time will show. I am a De Volens—a De Volens never forgets—nor forgives!'

He made this theatrical speech; he followed it by a theatrical bow. He did not touch my lady's hand nor look at her again. An instant later the door fell to with a loud, dull clang. The roll of departing wheels

announced the departure of our strange visitor. My master turned to his wife.

'I think,' he said, with cold gentleness, 'that you had better retire to your room again. Permit me to offer you my arm.'

She rose slowly, like one half stunned. But she did not take his arm.

'I hope,' she said, 'you do not blame me. I forbade him to come. I know you are my husband. All my duty and obedience are yours. I would not willingly have seen him.'

'I believe you,' he said, still very coldly. 'And I hope you will understand that it is at your father's imperative command that I close my doors on Pierre de Volens.'

She shivered as if with sudden cold.

'I will obey you,' she said. 'It is my duty.'

I think the words pained him, but I think it pained him more to see the little chilling gesture with which she turned from his offered arm, and went up the broad oak stairs alone. He watched her till she was out of

sight, then turned and leant against the great carved oaken mantelpiece, and I heard him groan.

I made a sign then to Mr. Basil, and, for once, he was actually good enough to obey it. Softly and quickly he crept to my side, and then followed his brother and myself into my own snug room. When we got there, however, the momentary fit of seriousness forsook him. He leapt straight on to the table. Then he crossed his arms on his breast and threw himself into a theatrical attitude.

'*Sacré nom de Dieu!*' he cried, in exact imitation of the strange gentleman's voice and manners. 'I do not forget—I. I am a De Volens—a De Volens never forgets, and nev-ar-r-e forgives!'

Then his mockery ceased, his face and voice grew grave.

'Deborah,' he said, 'I like Nancette. When I'm a man, I shall fight that frog-eating Frenchman! See if I don't!'

It might have been some half-hour later that my lady's bell rang. I went up to her

room, as she had brought no maid. My master met me at the door.

His hand was pressed against his heart. He looked like a man who had received a death-blow.

'Your mistress wants you,' he said. 'Go to her.'

He hurried down the stairs and into the library. I heard him close and lock the door.

All this happened two years ago. I have never set eyes on my master since.

CHAPTER III.

I TRY to keep to the sequence of events, but I find it is not so easy to write things down as it is to say them. This point of my story brings me to the point of my master's letter, written to me on that night.

I have said he locked himself in the library, and that from that hour to this, I have never seen him. But don't let it be supposed he came to a violent end or made away with himself, though, indeed, if I was writing a book, it would be a grim thing to say that the wicked Frenchman came back in the dead of night and stabbed him there in the old library, which was really the haunted room of Owl's Roost, on account of a murder long ago committed. But, as I am a truthful person, though I am afraid writers

of romance are not, I cannot say such a tragic event happened.

My master's luggage was in the hall, and Clitheroe told me he had received instructions to send it up to London next day. My master himself left the house as soon as he had written that letter to me, which I am now going to copy in here.

Copy of letter written to Deborah Clitheroe, March 3rd, 1867, by Errol Glendenning, Esq., of Owl's Roost:

'DEBORAH,

'I am going to put a great trust in you. Years of faithful service in our family have proved your worth, and there is no other living soul to whom I can turn in this dire strait, save yourself. I came back to my old home a few hours ago, thinking that at last I had tasted of happiness. I go from that home to-night a broken-hearted man. Heaven knows if I shall ever set foot in it again. . . . My hasty marriage amazed you all. I will briefly relate how it happened.

When I was at Nice I made the acquaintance of a French gentleman, by name the Comte de Forèze. He was a singular man. He had married an English lady, had been left a widower early in life with one child, a daughter. He had sent her to be educated in England when she was about thirteen, because his greatest desire was that she should grow up as much an Englishwoman as possible. He then sold the property he had in France, and for years travelled about, visiting different parts of the world. He was coming back to England, to see his daughter, when I met him at Nice. He was in great distress about her. A relative of his—an unprincipled, reckless spendthrift—had made acquaintance with the young lady, and written to ask his permission to marry her. The schoolmistress had foolishly permitted his visits, as he stated they were authorised by the father, and produced a letter to that effect. It is needless to say the letter was a forgery. Pierre de Volens is an unscrupulous man, and worse. As I had taken a

strong liking to the Comte de Forèze, and was at that time thinking of leaving Nice myself, I went back to England with him. We parted at the London terminus—he to go to his daughter, I to an hotel. I gave him my address at parting, begging him to come and see me when he had leisure. For a week I heard or saw nothing of him. Then, one evening, he called. I started when I saw him. In that one week he had grown into an old man. He apologised hurriedly for his long absence, stating that he had been occupied with business matters. I asked him about his daughter. He said she was well and happy; that he had managed to settle the troublesome cousin, and, fortunately, bring the young lady to reason.

'"Her heart was not in the affair," he said; "and all Pierre de Volens cared for was money. I told him I had no fortune to give my daughter, and he at once withdrew his offer for her hand."

'I did not pursue the subject, seeing that it troubled him. He remained an hour or so

with me, then gave me a pressing invitation to dine with his daughter and himself the next night. I accepted it, moved, I confess, by a strong curiosity to see the young lady who had caused all this trouble and anxiety. I saw her. I will confess, Deborah, that I had come to her presence prejudiced and cold. I left it, knowing to my cost that love was no fable of poets, that that pure, cold, lovely face would haunt me all my life long. From that day I was like a man in a dream. I was perpetually at her father's. Some spell drew me there too strong for mortal resistance. The old man noticed my infatuation, and was well pleased. As for Mdlle. de Forèze, she was always calm, and gracious, and serene. If she suspected my passion, she did not seem to notice it. She moved in another atmosphere, she seemed too spiritual and fair for the breath of this lower world. Her father at last spoke to me on the subject. He said nothing would please him better. The sole desire and ambition of his heart was that his daughter should marry an

Englishman. He knew my position and family; he seemed nervously anxious that I should expedite matters, or let him arrange the marriage French fashion. To this I objected. I wished to win her for myself, and to do so by my own unaided efforts. Some weeks had drifted by, too happily for me to notice their passage. One morning I went to the hotel by appointment. We were all going on an expedition for the day—the Count, and his daughter, and myself. I was a little before the time. She was alone in the sitting-room. We spoke a few words, then she went over to the window to look for her father. She said he had merely gone over to the jeweller's, opposite the hotel, to fetch his watch, which had been left for repair. In another moment we saw him come out of the shop. He glanced up at the window, and when he saw us both there, he smiled and waved his hand. I can never tell how it happened. In another instant there was a shout, a crowd, a host of moving figures, and plunging horses. I rushed

down the stairs and into the street. The porter at the hotel and two other men were bringing in a man's crushed and lifeless body.

'That was all that I ever saw again of the Comte de Forèze. . . . The poor child was well-nigh frantic with grief. Oh, the terrible days—the terrible time that followed! All the arrangements devolved on me — the horrors of the inquest and the funeral. He seemed to have no near relative, and I did not feel justified in sending for Pierre de Volens. I found no will among the dead man's papers, and no clue to his family or friends. There was a letter for me, enclosing a small, hard parcel, sealed and addressed to his daughter, and written on it were the words:

'"Not to be opened by Nancette until she has reached the age of twenty-one."

'There was a small balance of three hundred pounds at his banker's, which I drew out for his daughter at her desire. She still remained at the hotel. I tried to persuade

her to return for a time to her schoolmistress, but she seemed to have a horror of doing that, and I could only advise, not enforce. At last her loneliness and desolation gave me courage to plead my suit, and strengthen it by her father's wishes for its success.

'She listened silently. I saw that she was much moved.

'"You are sure," she said, "that he wished it?"

'"It was his great desire," I said; "but do not let that influence your decision if your heart does not wish it."

'For a moment she hesitated, and looked at me with those deep, solemn eyes that were like wells of mystery. Then she stretched out her hands.

'"I have not a friend in the world but you," she said. "I will be your wife if you wish."

'I was too bewildered and too happy to ask her for other assurance. I knew nothing of women. My life had always been that of a recluse. It seemed to me no woman would

give herself to a man unless she loved him with all her heart and soul.

'A month later we were married.

'I come now to the events of to-night. You know who Pierre de Volens is—the lover of my wife; the man whose character and principles were such, that her father declared to me he would sooner see her dead at his feet than wedded to such a scoundrel. Nancette had written, telling him of her intention to marry me. His answer was his appearance here to-night.

'Deborah, when I saw his face and hers, I knew I had been deceived. I knew that she had loved, and did love this man, despite her father's denial, despite her acceptance of me. When I went up to her room I asked her if my suspicions were correct. She refused to answer me. She said I had no right to inquire into her past—I, her husband. Heaven knows if I was cruel or passionate in my just reproaches, I only know that suddenly she swayed forward, and had I not caught her in

my arms, would have fallen to the ground. I laid her on the couch, I dashed some water on her face, and loosened the clasps of her dress. As I did so a scrap of paper fell out. It was a fragment of an old newspaper; there was an advertisement printed on it. Wondering why she should conceal such a thing about her, I looked at the words.

'Deborah, old and faithful servant as you are, I can't tell you more. . . . I only want to hide my shame and misery henceforth from every mortal eye. To your care I confide the wretched girl who is my wife in the eyes of the law, but who never can be wife to me in aught but name. No one knows of my marriage save just you of my household. Deborah, *no one must know!* Let her live here. See to her comforts; serve her with all service of your tender, womanly heart; but to any inquiries, let it appear she is only an orphan left to my guardianship—no less, no more. I have written her briefly to the same effect. She will obey my wishes for her own sake.

'All arrangements as to money matters I will write about from London. Also respecting my two wards.

'Do your best for me, Deborah. Hide my folly from prying eyes; and remember that the doors of my house are for ever closed to Pierre de Volens.

'Errol Glendenning.'

CHAPTER IV.

When I read this letter, I was, as one may say, dazed.

I could not understand the mystery a bit. Deeply as I pitied my master, I thought, in my heart, he was very foolish to run off in this fashion because of a schoolgirl's flirtation. Things might have all come right if he had waited; but now—well, what wife would like to occupy such a position as he had assigned to this poor, lonely girl? No; I could not think he had acted right, but then, also, I did not know the mystery of that scrap of paper.

That was evidently the clue to his conduct. There must be something more than a mere schoolgirl fancy connected with that mysterious advertisement.

No woman is without curiosity, and, for the matter of that, no man either. I would have given a great deal to know what that newspaper had contained, but, with no clue to dates or events, it was impossible to find out. Nothing remained for me but to accept the situation, and trust to time.

Not a soul knew of my master's marriage. His long absence had weakened people's memories of him. Very few in the neighbourhood ever came to Owl's Roost, and in the strange position my lady was to occupy, I scarcely thought she would care about visitors. The most difficult part of the business was to manage the servants.

They all knew of the marriage. They would all know of the sudden departure of their master. I scarcely knew what to say. I took counsel with Clitheroe. We both agreed it would be best to connect Mr. Glendenning's departure with business of importance relative to the strange visitor, who had summoned him abroad. In a week's time I persuaded my lady to come up to London

with me to make some purchases. A more gentle creature I never did see—that I will say for her.

When we were there, Clitheroe gave out that we had gone to meet the master on his return from the Continent. Then he next gave notice to the whole of the servants, paying them their month's wages, and stating as how Owl's Roost was going to be shut up for a year or more, as Mr. and Mrs. Glendenning were going to live abroad.

I engaged some new servants in London—a cook and two housemaids, a gardener and coachman, and a man for the stables. Then when the house was clear, my lady and I went back.

She did not seem to feel the strangeness of her position at first. She and the boys were much together, and Mr. Basil was her devoted slave. They accepted their guardian's departure with perfect content; they were too young to be very curious about the circumstance. My lady was always very quiet and very sad. Some deep trouble lay at her heart.

She seldom left the house, though the boys tried to persuade her. No one ever called, and I doubt if anyone in the neighbourhood knew anything of her presence save and except the rector. He called, but she would not see him.

I told the boys not to mention that their guardian was married, and they promised to obey. I suppose they did obey, as I never heard any inquiries on the subject, even from the rector. But he was a quiet, studious gentleman, and he had no wife.

As time went on there were changes. Master Basil and his brother went to school, and Mrs. Freere came as companion to my lady. She was just as nice a lady as ever stepped in shoe-leather. She had been used to live as a girl in a queer old house on the coast, with a crotchety old father who had been an admiral. She and Mr. Errol had been great friends once. Then Miss Myra got married all of a sudden, and went away to some foreign country. She was left a widow, and came home to the Old Hulks, as

the Admiral had named it. I think Mr. Errol must have asked her to live with his wife, but she did not seem to know anything of her story. She questioned me at first, but I had little to tell, only what I've written here now. Perhaps it may be useful one day.

Dear me, what a world of trouble this is, and what a deal of worry folks do give themselves! I often have thought that if Mr. Glendenning hadn't gone off so sudden-like, things might have been explained. I'm sure my lady was the sweetest creature, and every one took to her; but he didn't write to her but once—always to Mrs. Freere or to me. And, to my knowledge, he's never set foot in Owl's Roost since that night.

I have put all this down at odd times for Mrs. Freere's satisfaction. I have had troubles of my own since the day Mrs. Freere came here, and bitter sorrow, too. She has been like an angel to me, and I have learned to love her well-nigh as dear as my lady.

Looking at this that I have written, and remembering things as they were, I find my old brain puzzling itself as to what will be the end.

My poor husband's affliction has been a sore trial to me. I told Mrs. Freere that, from the time she and my lady left the house, he had failed and failed until this stroke took him, and set him apart from us all, as a mere piece of living childishness. But it is Heaven's will, and we have all our troubles to bear.

Here is a whole family made miserable for life by reason of a scrap of paper!

Will a day ever come when the cloud will lift off my master's heart and home, and the sunshine of peace and love fall over the darkness of Owl's Roost?

I pray for it every day I live.

BOOK II.

PAIN.

CHAPTER I.

Two boys were sitting in a large, old-fashioned and dingily-furnished room.

It was their own special 'den.' There was not much in it left for them to spoil, and that was its only disadvantage.

By the time they had inked the walls and covered them with caricatures, kicked off the rails of the chairs, notched their legs and arms, carved initials over the window-seats, and decorated the carpet with ink-splashes, the room looked as if it could not be improved. Bats and balls, fishing-tackle, and bows and arrows, were hung about the walls. Shelves of books in various stages of untidiness filled

the recesses on either side the window. That window itself, with its low, broad seat, and its outlook on the kitchen-garden, was their favourite nook. Here had they counselled and disputed, quarrelled and made friends, over and over again. Here had they sat concocting plots and schemes with a view to devastation, assault and battery, and general mischief. Here they sat now watching the rain as it descended in a dull, monotonous downpour, their bright young faces disconsolate and strangely grave.

'Well,' said the elder of the two, at last breaking silence, 'it's a rum go. What can be the matter? I don't know much about marrying—I know it's a thing people do—but to start off and leave your wife almost as soon as you've brought her home—I shouldn't think it was usual, should you, Stewart?'

The younger brother looked grave.

'It must have been the Frenchman,' he said.

'I expect so,' said the other reflectively. 'They're our natural enemies as a nation.

They're a dirty lot. What can you expect of people who eat frogs?'

'I wonder when we shall see her again?' said Stewart, passing the question as to his expectations of a nation whose culinary tastes were so in advance of his own. 'How pretty she is! She's French, too, isn't she, Basil?'

'Only half, so Deborah said. Her mother was English.'

'Do you think,' hazarded the younger brother, somewhat timidly, 'that she'll want to eat frogs?'

'Oh, very likely! We shall have to collect them for her. I've a mind to bring her that fine old fat one out of the pond. He ought to be in prime condition by now.'

'What are we to call her?' asked Stewart. 'She's got a French name, Debbie says.'

'I know what I'm going to call her,' said Basil coolly; 'I made up my mind last night: the Ladye Nancye. Isn't she just like her?'

Both pair of eyes turned instinctively to a

picture in the dark recess. It hung above the book-shelves. It was the picture of a woman. All the background was dark and sombre. She seemed to be looking down an avenue so dim, and shadowy, and mysterious that nothing could be clearly distinguished. She was clothed in loose and flowing white, and her face was white, and her eyes dark and sombre, and full of fear.

The two boys looked at each other again.

'It's awfully like her,' said Stewart under his breath.

'I think it *is* her,' said Basil, 'or her spirit come into the world again in the body of another woman.'

'When I saw her come down the stairs I felt frightened,' said Stewart. 'Wasn't she white?'

'She was so,' said Basil, nodding his head emphatically. Then he rose and looked at the clock. 'Ten!' he said. 'I don't mean to go to old Chasable's this morning. We'll have a holiday. I think it's our duty to try

and amuse our Ladye Nancye. Let's ask her if she'd like to look over the house.'

Stewart never dreamt of opposing a suggestion of his brother's. He had been always used to look up to him as a leading spirit. He, therefore, rose with alacrity, and the two little fellows presented themselves a few moments later at the door of a suite of rooms in the opposite wing to where their own door was situated.

Basil's knock was firm and decided, like most things about him.

A low, soft voice bade him come in, and the two boys found themselves in the presence of a slight, girlish figure. She was standing by the window looking out on the desolate grey sky and the sweeping rain. She did not look round as they entered.

Basil went up to her.

'Good-morning,' he said politely. 'I hope you have slept well.'

She started and looked in bewilderment at her youthful visitor. Then she seemed to recollect him. Her face grew a shade whiter.

'Ah, it is you!' she said. 'I had forgotten. You live here, then?'

'Yes,' said Basil frankly, 'at present. I hear our guardian's gone away. It's rather funny, but, of course, you know all about it.'

Her hand went suddenly to her bosom as if to clasp something hidden there. A faint colour stole into her white face. It was a lovely face, but so delicate and pure in colouring and feature that it scarcely looked like flesh and blood.

The boys watched her curiously.

'I know,' she said unsteadily, 'he had to leave here—on—on business. It was very sudden, but he will write and tell you.'

'Oh,' said Basil graciously, 'he needn't trouble. You'll do very well as a guardian, I'm sure. I didn't think I should like Mr. Glendenning to bring a wife here, but Stewart and I don't mind now we've seen you. We'll take care of you, don't you fear. That's what we've come to say.'

'Yes,' she said, looking a little puzzled as she met the frank, boyish eyes, 'that is very

kind. This seems a dull, dreary house,' she added with a shudder. 'I was thinking how dreary it was when you came in.'

'Oh, it's not half a bad old place when you get used to it,' explained Basil. 'We'll show you all over it, the haunted room and all, if you like.'

'The haunted room?' she said, and shivered suddenly. 'Oh, I hope that is not true.'

'We've never seen the ghost,' said Basil eagerly. 'We'd like to, but she doesn't come. We've tried all sorts of dodges to draw her out, but it's no use. I think she's a fraud myself. But will you come and look over the house?'

'Yes,' she said with an effort; 'I should like to see it.'

'I don't know about these matters,' remarked Basil, as he led the way, 'but I should fancy the husband ought to be showman on these occasions. However, Mr. Glendenning was always different to everybody else. If you haven't found that out, you soon will. By the way'—and he

stopped abruptly and surveyed the new mistress — 'aren't you cold in that white dress?'

'No,' she said; 'the stuff is thick. I always wear white.'

Stewart and Basil exchanged a rapid glance.

'Isn't it queer?' whispered the younger of the two; 'so did the other one.'

It was two hours later before the tour of the house had been completed. Then the boys took their new friend into their own special sanctuary. A huge fire burnt in the wide, open fireplace. They drew an old-fashioned leather armchair up before it, and made her sit down.

'Whenever you feel lonely, or in want of a chat, just come in here,' said Basil; 'we'll put you up to no end of larks, if you like. I'm sure you'd be more at home here than in any other part of the house.'

'I think I should,' she said, half-smiling, as she looked at the flushed, eager faces of her young hosts.

'In strict confidence,' said Basil, dragging up a stool, and sitting down at her feet, 'I don't mind telling you that I look upon Mr. Glendenning as a failure, in the shape of a husband. Perhaps he'll improve, but he has certainly not begun well. I, in his place, should have arranged all business matters before I married. Then I could have looked after my wife, you see. Still, we'll do our best for you. Won't we, Stewart?'

Stewart agreed with alacrity.

'First, though,' went on the loquacious Basil, 'I must tell you we don't think much of foreigners. You, I expect, are pretty glad you're half English. Still your name's foreign, isn't it?'

'My name,' she said, 'is Nancette. My mother was an Englishwoman, my father a French nobleman.'

'We won't go into particulars,' said Basil loftily. 'All I've got to say is, we don't mean to call you Nancette. Nancye is better, and has an old English flavour about it. Ladye

Nancye if you like, but certainly Nancye. You don't mind—do you?'

'Not in the least,' she said smiling. 'I like your name better than my own.'

'It might be your own,' said Stewart timidly; 'only you've forgotten; it's such a long time since you were on earth before.'

'Since I was on earth before! But what is it then you mean?' exclaimed their new friend amazed.

'Shut up, Stewart!' muttered his brother. 'You see,' he explained, turning to Nancette, 'he's got an idea you're like a picture of someone, and that her spirit's come back in you.'

'Oh!' said the girl somewhat mystified; 'that is *drôle* for a fancy. Who was the lady?'

'There's the picture. You can look at it if you like.'

She followed the direction of his hand, then rose and went up to the strange painting, and looked at it long and earnestly.

'Like me!' she said below her breath.

Again her hand went to her heart with a sudden involuntary movement. 'Am I like that? She looks so desolate, so heart-broken, so alone. See how her eyes gaze down, down that avenue, watching for someone who never comes.'

'That,' said Basil, 'is the Ladye Nancye. She was wife to one of the Glendennings in the time of the Pretender. Her husband was killed in battle. She is supposed to be looking for him, or news of him. That's our avenue, you know.'

The girl shivered and turned away.

'It is a sad picture,' she said. 'I am sorry you think it resembles me.'

Then she resumed her seat.

'Listen,' she said slowly, 'you are only children, but perhaps you will understand. It is my fault that your guardian, Mr. Glendenning, has gone away like this. He may not come back for a long, long time. It is his wish that I should stay here, and I am his wife, and I must obey. I think it best to tell you. You have been so kind to me this

morning, and yet, to you, I am only a stranger, and not even a countrywoman. Your name for me is prophetic. My fate here may be as unhappy as that of your Ladye Nancye, there. I—I want to tell you both that it is all my fault—it is not Mr. Glendenning's. You owe him love, obedience, gratitude. You owe me nothing; I am only an interloper. I cannot hold up my head and take my place here, and I am quite friendless in the world. Now, that is all my history. I do not think it is quite right, perhaps, that you should be friendly with me, or care for me. I am grateful to you; you could make me happier; but still Mr. Glendenning might not like it.'

'Then,' said Basil, taking her hand, and looking frankly and fearlessly into her troubled eyes, 'Mr. Glendenning can do—the other thing. Stewart and I are going to be your champions, your knights, and all that sort, you know. We knew there was a screw loose somewhere, but we put it down to the Frenchman. However, you cheer up. It'll all come

right some day. Meanwhile, we'll take care of you.'

'Yes,' said Stewart, rising and taking her other hand; 'Basil always does what he says. We'll take care of you!'

CHAPTER II.

'You haven't been out for a week, Ladye Nancye. Come along this morning with us. We'll have a look at the sea. It's only a mile and a half to walk, and it will do you good.'

Basil said this, standing at the boudoir-door, cap in hand, his handsome boyish face flushed and rosy with exercise. He and Stewart had been racing each other down the avenue.

'The Ladye Nancye,' as he called her, lifted her head, and looked out of the window.

'How is it you're not at school?' she said.

'It's Saturday. You always forget Saturday. Don't you know old Chasable has to

write his sermon — I mean crib it. He couldn't compose an original one if he tried.'

'Basil once wrote a sermon for him,' interposed Stewart, who, as usual, was close to his brother. 'It was very short, but the rector wouldn't have it.'

'What was it about?' asked Nancette curiously.

She had reached down her hat from a peg, where it was hanging, and now put it on.

'The text was, "And when they rose up in the morning they were all dead men," and Basil said: "This is a mistake, dear brethren. If they'd been dead they wouldn't have got up and seen each other, could they, dear brethren? Consequently someone's wrong. I don't say who. I think you'd better ask the Bishop about it, dear brethren. He'd be sure to know."'

'Was that all?' asked Nancette in surprise.

'It was quite enough,' said the young author. 'I don't hold with long sermons.

I told old Chasable that. But he still writes them. I see you've got on your hat. I thought all women had to look in the glass to put their hats on. You never do.'

The girl smiled.

'I can feel if it's straight,' she said. 'That's all it wants.'

They left the room, and went down the broad stairs, and so out into the fresh, cool air, and brilliant sunlight.

'I wish you wouldn't mope so much,' said Basil presently. 'You look so white. I can't make out whether you're pretty. I suppose you'd be considered so, but I like more colour than you've got.'

'I am always pale,' said the girl with a faint sigh. 'I am not like your rosy English maidens, you know.'

'Deborah thinks you very pretty,' said Stewart eagerly. 'She often says so.'

'Do you think it matters much about one's looks?' asked Basil. 'Do all girls want to be pretty?'

'At school they were always talking about

beauty,' said Nancette. 'They seemed to think a great deal depended on it.'

'Oh, husbands, of course,' scoffed Basil indignantly. 'Just like girls—always bothering their heads about men. I've no patience with them.'

'You don't know any,' remarked Stewart wisely.

'Well, I hear enough about Jago's sisters and cousins.'

'Who is Jago?' inquired Nancette curiously.

'The other boy who goes to old Chasable's,' answered Basil. 'Such a duffer! He boards there because he's delicate. His place is twenty miles off. He's always bragging about it, and he's been in London. He thinks no end of himself for that.'

'He's bigger than Basil, but Basil can lick him easily,' said Stewart.

'I should think so,' said the handsome boy, lifting his fair curly head defiantly; 'and then, he cries.'

'But you know, dear,' said Nancette

gently, 'all boys are not strong like you. Even Stewart is different. You ought not to bully them if they're timid and weak.'

'I bully!' exclaimed Basil, flushing up indignantly. 'I wouldn't do such a thing, Ladye Nancye.'

'No, that he wouldn't,' agreed Stewart. 'Jago's a bully, and a sneak too. Basil only fought him because he'd never let me alone.'

'Boys are very funny,' said Nancette with a sigh. 'I suppose they wouldn't be happy if they hadn't someone to fight.'

'Do you know,' said Basil eagerly, 'I've been breaking in the little mare for you? I want you to come riding with us. Will you?'

'But I can't ride,' she answered.

'Well, I'll teach you. It's awfully easy. I wanted Debbie to practise the mare a bit, but she wouldn't. She said she was too old. When she was a girl she was a rare one to ride. Old Clithy says so. What a pity people get old, isn't it?'

'Yes,' agreed Nancette; 'only they seem more content than when they're young.'

'Well, you're young enough,' said Basil patronisingly; 'and you must learn to ride, and drive, and skate, and all that, you know. It will do you a world of good. Why, Mr. Glendenning won't know you when he comes back.'

The girl's face seemed to grow whiter and more sorrowful at his random words. She did not answer them. The two boys rattled on, however, plunging recklessly into subjects and out of them. Nancette was always a quiet companion, but, nevertheless, she made a very sympathetic one.

At this time, and with the heavy burden of her life's error to bear, and bear alone, no society would have been tolerable but that of the two frank, loyal young knights who had devoted themselves to her service.

Strange as her position was, its full strangeness had not dawned upon her yet. Her marriage had been a fatal mistake, she had discovered that even in its first early days;

but as yet she only felt the relief of her husband's absence. He had told her to remain in his house, and she did so. Friends she had none. Society she had none—except the boys. But she was altogether ignorant of the world as a judge and an inquisitor; and it had not yet occurred to her that her position was ambiguous, and would necessitate explanation.

A sort of lull had descended on her life after a terrible storm of woe and sorrow. The peace was so tranquil and so sweet that she did not care to question its possible duration or extent.

Some day, of course, her husband would return. Some day, things would be explained—or she might die and set him free. It had never occurred to her that he loved her very deeply. He was not a man to wear his heart on his sleeve. He had been a true, and tender, and loyal friend, and her father—knowing her past secret and its folly—had counselled her to marry him. In her sorrow, and loneliness, and desolation, she

had turned to him as to a rock of strength. Insensibly she had drifted too far to retreat. Then she learnt what he had a right to expect—what she, alas! could never give—or so it had seemed to her then. An avalanche of doubt, shame, and torture had descended upon his life. He had said bitter and cruel words to her, but she had listened patiently, knowing too late that they were well deserved.

She thought of him often—thought of him with regret, but never with longing. Passion seemed dead in her—frozen by a bitter experience, slain by a treacherous hand. Life was henceforth to be a cold and empty existence. That was her fate. About his—the man she had wronged, she did not think. Her heart was still too crushed and too sorrowful.

Had she been able to read that other heart, she would have shrunk appalled from the sufferings she had dealt. There was no balm for his wound—the wound that small, white, woman's hand had given. It had cut its

way deep down to his heart; it must bleed and bleed unstanched till life should end. All that could make life desirable or dear would flow out with that flowing blood—energy, hope, love, joy, peace, desire, all were over for him. Life was looked on only as a torture-chamber; each phase could but hold fresh agony. Yet it must be lived through, without help or pity from any living soul.

Had he seen her now—the woman who had given him this living death to bear—he would have judged her, perhaps, more harshly than she deserved. She was still so young, and the boys' merry voices, and jests, and anecdotes had won her to laugh at, and with them.

The springtime was at its best and brightest. The dark tree-stems were covered with tender shoots of green. Now and then a bird's sweet, full-throated song quivered through the air, rich with glad thanksgiving for its young, free life. In every nook and rocky cranny were hues of wild-flowers, and opening fronds of ferns. The wind was fresh

and cool, bringing the keen breath of the sea on its wings.

The girl was running a race with her two companions up the rocky slope, from whence the first view of the sea could be obtained. Light of foot, and quick as a young fawn, she easily distanced them. She reached the summit, and, taking off her hat, waved it in triumph to Basil, who was still some distance off. The wind caught her hair, and ruffled it into little rings and tendrils all over her delicate temples.

The rapid run had brought colour into her cheeks, and light into her eyes. As she stood there, with the wind blowing the loose white folds of her gown back from her slight young form, and the sunlight on her hair, she made a lovely picture.

The boys shouted out that they were going to scramble down the cliff by another way, so she turned her face towards the sea. The long, slow rollers, fringed with foam, were breaking noisily and majestically on the rocks below, but even as her eyes rested on them,

a shadow fell across her path, and a figure stood between her and the flashing sunlight.

She looked up, and a low cry escaped her lips.

'Pierre!' she cried. 'You!'

He seized her hand, and looked down at her paling face and trembling lips.

'At last!' he murmured passionately—'at last! Oh, Nancette, is it a thousand years since that cruel night? It seems so, dear; and you—you can smile and laugh still!'

Slowly she drew a step or two away; but he still held her hand firmly in his clasp, and his eyes seemed to devour every feature of her lovely face.

But for her the warm spring air seemed suddenly to grow chill; a great terror seized her as in a grasp of ice; the very sun seemed misty and indistinct.

'Nancette, won't you speak? Have you no word for me?' pleaded her companion. 'I have watched for you—hungered for sight

of you this month past. I heard you were alone here. Is it true?'

'Yes,' she said, finding voice at last; 'Mr. Glendenning left me that night.'

'That—night!' His voice sounded hoarse and unsteady. 'Then I had my revenge,' he said slowly.

She looked at him.

'Oh, Pierre,' she faltered, 'why did you come? I prayed you to keep away. You forget my father's command.'

'Your father is not here to part us now,' he said—his voice had a ring of triumph, and his eyes looked down into hers with a burning, eager light that made her tremble and turn faint—'nor your husband either,' he added below his breath.

'The wrong is just the same—even though they do not know it,' she faltered. 'Both of them have forbidden your presence.'

'In the house—yes. But we are under the free roof of heaven, and no one can prevent my speaking to you here. And I must speak, Nancette. You have misjudged

me, and wronged me. You would not hear me when—when I pleaded——'

She shrank back.

'Hush!' she said; 'you forget. You lured me on to take a false step. Afterwards, when you heard I was poor, you told my father you could not marry me; he said so. And then that week—oh, Pierre, that terrible week! How could you so trap and deceive me? I was only an ignorant schoolgirl, steeped to the lips in romance! I believed all you said—and then, oh, you don't know what cruel truths my father told me, and that—that woman!'

'Curse her!' he muttered fiercely. 'It was all her fault.'

'You have spoilt all my life,' went on the girl piteously. 'I loved you, and I believed in you—yes, against all I had heard and been warned about, I believed in you. And, after all, it was only money you cared for—not me!'

'I cared for you, above and beyond all things in the world!' he answered vehemently.

'You know that. I did not lie. I love you —to my own misery, I know it. Your father was determined to part us. He told you one story—he told me another. There is no truth in yours, that I swear! Certain legal formalities had to be gone through. Before they were arranged you were discovered—dragged from me. I only heard of you again when you had married this Englishman—your father's ally and friend. The man who helped to steal you from me!'

His face was white with passion; his eyes flamed with a wrath and scorn that terrified the girl.

Doubts began to awaken once more within her heart. He was her girlhood's lover, and she had been torn from his arms. That was all she remembered.

Suddenly the shouts and sounds of boyish voices from the rocks below, started and aroused her. Instinctively she drew farther from the edge of the cliff, and drew him with her.

'They must not see you!' she said in horror. 'They will tell their guardian. Oh, go—leave me now, Pierre. Whether you are in the wrong, or I, it is too late to alter anything! I am another man's wife. Law and duty part us once again. It is all wrong, and cruel, and terrible, I know; but it is too late to alter anything now!'

The hurried words, the imploring voice, did not move him to pity her, but only to serve and aid himself and his purpose.

'If I go now,' he said, 'you must see me again; 'I will not leave you like this.'

'I cannot disobey my husband,' she faltered; 'you remember what he said.'

'I have no desire to cross his threshold; but see you I must and will. Meet me here to-morrow, at noon. I have a right to see you, and I demand to see you! Will you come, Nancette?'

Piteously, affrightedly—like a bird might look at its captor—she looked up at him. Her fluttering breath came and went in piti ful entreaty.

'Pierre, don't ask me—don't persuade me! It is wrong—you know it is wrong!'

'Promise,' he said inexorably—'promise to meet me, if only once more.'

'Only—once more?' she faltered. 'You are sure—sure you will not force me to do so again?'

He smiled ironically.

'No; I will leave you then—if you desire it.'

Again the voices from below sounded clear and shrill on the soft spring air.

She shuddered and drew away.

'I must go,' she said.

He drew her suddenly into his arms and kissed her on the lips.

'Till noon to-morrow, cousin,' he said.

CHAPTER III.

'Will you come with us to church this morning, Ladye Nancye?' asked Basil, as he rose from the breakfast-table and sauntered over to the chair where Nancette sat, presiding over the meal and the two boys; 'you've never been yet.'

'To church!' Her eyes drooped suddenly. 'Oh no. Not to-day,' she said. 'You must go with Deborah.'

'We always go with Deborah,' said Stewart discontentedly. 'I wish you'd come for a change.'

'How long does the service last?' asked Nancette. The bright spot on either cheek had deepened in colour; her voice was hurried and anxious.

'We never get home till half-past one,'

said Basil. 'I thought you knew that. We've been nearly every Sunday since you were here. Don't you ever mean to come to church?' he added anxiously.

'Yes—oh yes,' she said nervously—'only not to-day. It is all so strange, your country churches—everyone stares so. I know that. I—I have not courage yet.'

'They will only think you're another ward of Mr. Glendenning's,' urged Basil. 'I'm sure you look young enough. How old are you—sixteen?'

'Seventeen,' she corrected gravely.

'Four years older than me,' said Basil, gravely surveying her; 'not that you look it. Well, what will you do all the time we're away—mope?'

'I—I shall read, or go in the grounds,' she said nervously.

She could not meet the boy's clear eyes; her guilty secret weighed heavily on her mind.

'Well,' he muttered discontentedly, 'if you won't, you won't. It's a beastly

shame! I did so want you to hear old Chasable.'

She rose from the table.

'You shall take me for a walk this afternoon,' she said.

'We'll go to the Smuggler's Cave, then,' said Basil eagerly; 'that's a fine place. Do you know, it runs inland from the sea for nearly a mile? The smugglers used to have a fine time of it there, I should fancy.'

But Nancette was not listening. Her eyes kept turning anxiously to the clock. At last she left the room, and the boys went off to old Deborah, who was waiting for them, stiff and prim, in her Sunday attire.

'Won't my lady come?' she asked, as they entered her room.

'No,' said Basil; 'she's afraid of being stared at. Deb, I do wish you'd tell us what the row was. Doesn't Mr. Glendenning really intend to come back?'

The old woman—a faithful servitor in the household—looked gravely at the curious young face.

'Mr. Basil, I told you that something had gone wrong between them,' she said; 'I can't say more. Only time can right it. I pity the poor young thing—with all my heart I pity her. But she ought never to have married Mr. Glendenning.'

The boy was silent. Young as he was, his chivalry and devotion had all gone out to this lonely, friendless girl, whose fate seemed at once so strange and inexplicable. He wished he could help her; he was always wishing it, but it did not seem possible. Perhaps some day, he thought, she would give him her confidence, and then he would understand this dark mystery. At present it was hopeless.

With his usual boisterous spirits strangely subdued, he got into the waggonette which was to take them to church. From the window of her room Nancette saw them depart, and saw, too, the upward glance and disappointed look of the bright young face, as it failed to meet her own.

A sigh of relief escaped her; she looked

again at the clock. Half-past ten! It was an hour's walk to the trysting-place. She had still half an hour's leisure.

She took off her pretty morning-gown, and put on an outdoor dress. It was a thick, creamy fabric, simply and plainly made, as all her dresses were. Then she twisted her lovely hair into a loose, soft knot, and put on her hat.

These preparations complete, she stood and looked at herself. This would be her last tryst—perhaps her last meeting with the lover she had so passionately loved. It did not seem to her that she was committing a wrong now — that she was breaking her husband's command in the spirit, if not in the letter. The strange force of attraction which this man had had for her drew her resistlessly towards him.

She scarcely looked upon herself as a wife. Her husband had faded like a shadow from out of her life and heart. A few curt words of farewell, a cruel sentence, and a lonely

fate—these were all that reminded her of her strange marriage-day. And in contrast there bloomed again before her the passion-flower of her girlish love. The man who had been her ideal of chivalry, tenderness, and devotion, was again at her side. She did not ask herself what chivalry that could be, that only sought to ruin and deceive; what devotion could live in the selfishness of a baffled passion; or what tenderness lurk in a pitiless pursuit of helplessness, and ignorance, and faith.

It was not possible for her yet to see her idol as he was. The halo of a girl's romance still shielded him and kept him holy. They had both been persecuted and wronged, he most of all; and she told herself she owed him some amends for all the pain she had dealt out. Therefore had she consented to see him to-day, to taste the bitter-sweet of explanation and farewell. They could not part thus; it was not possible; and her thoughts grew saddened and confused; and all the time the clock ticked on, and the

minutes passed, and the time drew near when she must keep her promise.

Hurriedly she glanced around. The sombre magnificence of the room struck cold and chill on her excited fancy. It was like her own life, she thought — rich in all outer appearance, but dark, and dreary, and desolate within.

With a shudder she turned away, then opened the door and hurried down the stairs, and passed out into the grounds by the window of the library.

The bells were chiming softly in the distance; the air was cool, and warm, and balmy as summer. All around was so still that she almost fancied she could hear the sound of the sea, the low, monotonous murmur of its tireless voice.

She took the path the boys had shown her. Her white dress flickered in and out of the dark trees. The lovely air, the songs of the birds, the rustling of the leaves, seemed to gladden and delight her. Her feet scarcely seemed to touch the ground;

her heart was beating wildly and excitedly.

The way grew wilder and more rocky as she approached the shore. The swell of the sea was loud and distinct. She moderated her pace then, with that unfailing woman's instinct which teaches concealment of what it most desires.

He was there already, and he hurried down the cliff to her side.

'Let us go on the shore,' he said, drawing her hand within his arm. 'We can sit down there and talk.'

The absence of any formal greeting, the calm, even tones of his voice, reassured her. How natural it seemed to be ruled and directed by him! How it brought back the old girlish dreams and hopes, and turned her sorrowful present into gladness once again.

In silence they went down the steep and rocky path. The wide sweep of blue sea lay before them. Here and there a bird fluttered over its expanse. The fringe of the waves left a white line upon the glitter-

ing shingle. The tall cliffs towered above. It was a quiet enough retreat, and the girl's eyes took in its beauty with something near akin to pain. She thought what such a scene and such companionship might have meant for her once. Now—alas! alas! what could anything mean for her, in her spoilt and ruined life?

She seated herself on a rugged block of rock that looked as if it had been hurled from the cliff. He took his place beside her.

'I was half afraid you would not come,' he said, by way of prelude. 'I thought you might have had one of your conscientious fits.'

'Don't speak like that!' said the girl gently. 'It is like you in your bad moods.'

She looked at him as she spoke, and thought what a perfect face it was—this face of her maligned and persecuted cousin.

The wavy brown hair, the large, melting eyes, and curling lashes, the beautifully-shaped features—how well she knew them

all! The mouth alone marred the face—it was hard, and cruel, and sensual; but it was carefully hidden by the thick moustache, and the face carried its attractions fearlessly and almost insolently.

Beauty is a great power, let men say what they will. If it had not been for Pierre de Volens's handsome face and magnificent figure, he would not have been the success of Parisian *salons*. He could not have robbed women under the guise of chivalry and misfortune, or levied black-mail in a thousand specious ways on all classes and communities of frail and fashionable life.

His debts were enormous, his extravagances the theme of many tongues. He had gambled, and speculated, and raced away a fair fortune, and been reduced to living by his wits and not over scrupulous talents. Men had trusted, and women loved him, to their cost. Friendship and love were alike to him, but the means to an end, or a variety of ends.

Being utterly unscrupulous, he never paused

to consider how others might suffer, so long as his own immediate comfort was procured.

This was the idol that Nancette worshipped; this the man for whose sake she had well-nigh broken her father's heart, and ruined her husband's life. Only her ignorance and innocence could plead her excuse —that, and the fatal fascination of a man only too well skilled in the arts that attract women—a man in whose hands she had been malleable as wax, and trustful as a child.

He met her glance, and saw with triumph how the colour sprang into the clear pallor of her face, how shyly her eyes drooped before his own.

'I am not in one of my bad moods,' he said gently; 'but I am very unhappy.'

'And so,' she said, 'am I.'

He drew a long breath. He was wondering whether he dared speak all that was in his heart.

'I am sick of my life,' he said slowly;

'it has never been the same to me, Nancette, since I lost you.'

She was silent, but she trembled greatly.

'If you would tell me how it really happened,' she said. 'My father always blamed you. It was not my fault — you know that. I was ready to be your wife, even though he forbade it; but it was you who gave me up, Pierre—that you know.'

'I could not help myself,' he said bitterly. 'It meant ruin for us both at that time. But I thought you would be true—that you would wait, or your father would relent. I was not prepared for—for what followed.'

The dangerous break in his voice stabbed her gentle heart. How could she tell it was an actor's trick—the successful result of long practice?

'But that is not what I wish to speak about to-day,' he went on, as she remained silent. 'You have made a fatal error, and spoilt both our lives; but no doubt strong pressure was put upon you. And, in spite

of your English education, your father's will was law in a question of marriage. You thought my absence and silence sufficient proof that I no longer loved you. That is so like a woman. I thought of you every hour of every day that we were parted. I could not come to you, or reach across the barrier that separated us; but I thought you would be true to me. So much trust, at least, I had in you, and now this cursed Englishman has taken you from me.'

'Is it only to say this over again that you have forced me to meet you, Pierre?' questioned the girl. 'We knew it all before. I told you my story. I told you also what my father said of you. Without a fortune you would not marry me; he had none to give me; so we parted.'

'I do not believe him,' said Pierre de Volens, slowly; 'I am sure he was rich. It was the Englishman who made him tell that lie.'

'It is too late to mend it now,' said the girl, hopelessly. 'I know I am very wretched,

and I think, too, I must be very wicked, but I cannot help it.'

'I don't want you to help it, sweetheart,' he said passionately; 'but it is not too late to be happy. That is what I wanted to say to you. That is why I wished to meet you here, Nancette. I have a story to tell you. It is of two people, unhappy as ourselves, yet bold and brave enough to take Fate into their own hands and shape it to their will. Will you listen?'

His voice had sunk to its tenderest and most persuasive tones—the voice that spoke the language of her own country in the language of her own heart. The dreamy spell of the day and the scene, and that fatal presence, were round her like a web of doom. She leant back against the rocks, her eyes half-closed, her colour wavering fitfully, as she felt the burning glance that sought, yet repelled her own.

'I am listening,' she said.

CHAPTER IV.

Pierre de Volens drew a long breath. All ignoble passions and desires were at work within his breast. It seemed to him that his hour of revenge was at hand.

Beyond the rocky headland a boat lay idly moored. Farther off a white sail gleamed on the blue width of water. The girl leaned back quite still, and, as he thought, content. She was lulled to dreamy rapture; of right or wrong she did not think.

His voice broke across the stillness. It's soft, persuasive music thrilled her heart and stayed its power of judgment.

'My story,' he said, 'is short, but it is true. A man and woman loved—as we do. Like us, also, they were parted by a cruel fate. She married a man to whom she was

only a shadow; a rich old imbecile, to whom her parents sold her. And he—he put the width of half the world between them, and for years tried to forget. But, Nancette, a man does not forget the woman he has once loved. The world says so, but the world lies. And after years they met again—suddenly and strangely—without warning. Then they knew what time had done for them. A look broke down the barrier of years, a word—just one brief word—told a life's history, for honour and duty are no food for craving hearts, and the world's poor barriers are puny indeed before the water-flood of a great love. "You are wretched," he said, "and I—I am a lonely, haunted man. Love, let us make our own happiness. There are other countries to fly to. The world is wide, and our world is each other. We have tasted the bitterness of barren years, the emptiness of vain longings and struggles, and starved and empty days Let them end at last. If love were not more than all these things it would have died out

of our hearts ere this. If it is for life, shall it not also bless life?" Are you listening, Nancette?'

'Yes.'

The burning colour surged up to her brow. Her eyes were hidden still.

'She—she listened also, and her heart spoke as any woman's heart speaks—when she lets it. Where a great love is, there is always trust. Nancette—there are no two people in all the world happier than those two of whom I am speaking.'

For a moment she was silent.

'And—and her husband?' she asked faintly.

'Oh,' laughed Pierre de Volens, with a laugh that jarred upon her sensitive nerves like a discord in music, 'he was soon consoled.'

'But the—the other? Did he never blame her, never say that she was wrong in so forgetting duty, honour, self-respect?'

'Those words are the cant of virtue, when it is too fearful of outside blame. She had given up all for him. Why should he

blame her? Nancette, how little you know men!'

She might have said 'Yes,' to her cost, with such a man beside her, with such tempting and treachery assailing her ignorance, and weakness, and belief. But his voice and presence had lulled her to forgetfulness. And, in a girl's dreams, what is her lover but a hero and a god?

'I only know—you,' she said softly. 'You came into my life and changed it from peace to storm—from content to suffering—from ——'

'From stagnation to love, and joy, and knowledge,' he interpolated. 'Have you suffered by the exchange? Would you have the old peace and quiet—the dull, commonplace round of duties back, and give me no place in your heart or thoughts again?'

'No,' she said, growing white in her passionate earnestness. 'I would not, Pierre. When I knew I loved you——'

'Don't speak of it in the past,' he said. 'You love me still—you cannot deny it.

Let us look the truth in the face to-day for the last time. The world is full of shams and hypocrisies. Experience and advantage are the enemies of love. But I have shown you that love can conquer every difficulty and every barrier that the world and its false code of honour sets up!'

'You know the world,' she said timidly. 'I—I am only an ignorant girl, whose life has all gone wrong, and through you, Pierre. I can only remember my father's warnings, and—and my love, that will not be stamped out or conquered, try how I may. But something tells me it is wrong to listen to you. Though my husband is only a name—a shadow, yet he gave his honour into my hands.'

'A mere form of words cannot make him your husband,' said Pierre de Volens stormily. 'Why is he not with you? Why does he insult you by an absence so unwarrantable?'

'I—I have his letter. Will you read it?' she said, drawing a folded paper from her dress. 'I could not quite understand it, but

he thinks I have deceived him, and'—she added, with a hot, shamed blush—'he is right.'

The young man took the paper. Its contents were very brief. He began to read them with a clouded brow, but a look of triumph flashed in his eyes as he reached the end.

'What could he have seen?' he asked the girl. 'Your father never told him about—about that week?'

'No; I am sure of that,' she answered. 'He told me he would not breathe the secret to living soul, and he never broke his word. I cannot make it out,' she went on as she took the letter back. 'It is all a mystery.'

'I am very thankful for the mystery,' said Pierre de Volens, dropping his voice and drawing nearer to her. 'It seems to leave you still my own. There is only a shadow between us, and that shadow a word from you will dispel. Oh, love, don't shrink from me like that! This day—this hour won't come to us again. When I left your pre-

sence on that miserable night, I thought I would never set eyes on your face again. But something drove me back—something stronger than my will, more faithful than my faith. And that something sent you to me once more, and so we met, and to-day I have decided that Fate is too strong. You won't hold an empty sound dearer than a man's whole heart — will you, Nancette? That letter divorces you from the man you were foolish enough to wed, as surely as any human laws could do. He will not call you wife, he will not return: and I—Nancette, think of me; of my loneliness—my uselessness—my despair. Surely my love could console you for what you lose in the eyes of the few who know your story? Besides, the world is all before us. We can live for each other. Oh, love, don't look like that! Is it so hard a thing I ask? Think of our dreams realised, our hopes fulfilled, our happiness too full and complete for one regret to soil it, our hearts, our souls as one, our——'

She held up her hand.

'Listen,' she said. 'The barrier that first parted us still exists. Pierre, you know what your life has been, better than I do. When I could have been your wife, you let that barrier part us. Now'—she turned aside her white face—'now,' she added brokenly, 'you best know what it is you offer me, when I am so friendless and so wretched that despair alone urges me to listen.'

His eyes went out to the white speck on that glittering blue of the sea.

'I offer you,' he said, 'freedom, happiness, love. You need never go back to that dreary house again.'

She rose and looked at him then; she seemed to see his face, and his alone, between two worlds of blue—the mingling blue of sea and sky. All other thoughts and feelings passed vaguely into space, and she looked into his heart and read only a love that answered to her own.

She stood on the threshold of destiny. This was the one supreme moment of her

life, and by it she must rise or fall. Yet some instinct warned her against self-abasement. Something held her back almost against her will, and kept unuttered the one fatal word that would have sealed her fate. He knew every sign of trembling, of hesitation, of fear. This was no first experience for him, as she in her innocence believed. He loved her with that supreme selfishness of passion that seeks its own aim and object at any cost, and he was resolved to baffle Fate at last.

To win her meant not only his own triumph, but triumph over a man he hated.

'Won't you speak?' he said at last. 'Your silence is torture. If you send me from you now, what will your life be? And mine——'

Briefly she reviewed the possibility, her eyes downcast, her heart beating stormily and nervously, despite the quiet of her attitude and face.

'Might we not be friends?' she said hesitatingly.

His scoffing laugh cut short that feeble quibble.

'Friends! A woman's paltry suggestion! the offer of a stone for bread. No, my cousin; it is too late for subterfuge. I will have love or hate. We shall be all in all, or strangers. I want no middle course, no playing at platonics. They may suit your tame, cold Englishmen, but I am——'

'A De Volens and a scoundrel!' burst out a clear, shrill voice, so close behind him that he sprang aside as if from a blow.

'Basil!' faltered the girl, pale and trembling, as she met the angry indignant glance of her young champion.

'Yes—Basil!' said the boy, coolly pushing the young man aside, and taking his stand beside her. 'Now, you sir,' he went on, flashing like a young lion upon the astonished Frenchman, 'perhaps you'll tell me what right you have to insult this lady? Mr. Glendenning left her in my care. I heard him forbid you the house. I suppose you've waylaid her here. I heard what you

were saying to her. Be sure Mr. Glendenning shall hear of it too!'

'Get out of my way, you young cub!' cried Pierre de Volens furiously. 'What do you mean by interfering with my cousin? If you don't take yourself off, I'll pitch you into the sea yonder! Do you think I am to be bearded in this fashion by a foolish boy?'

'Oh, hush, Pierre—hush!' cried Nancette, clinging to the boy's arm in terror. 'Remember he is but a child in comparison with you!'

'Child or not, let him take himself off as quick as he came, or it will be worse for him!' hissed Pierre de Volens with rising fury.

Basil only laughed.

'I'm not afraid!' he said. 'I don't quite understand your lingo, but I suppose you want to fight. I'm quite ready. I know you want Nancette to run away with you. I heard you ask her, but I should think she has too much sense.'

'No, no; I am not going!' cried the girl

wildly. 'Oh, Basil, take me home—take me home! I was mad to come here—mad to listen! Pierre,' she went on passionately, 'you did not mean it. You would repent as—as I should. I can't break my trust. My life may be dreary—hopeless, as you say; but I must bear it. Oh, forget what you said! Let us part, even if it is for ever. I have done one wrong. Don't urge me to commit a greater.'

He drew back, an evil light in his handsome eyes, a sneer on his lips.

'I have no wish to urge you,' he said. 'Your consent was given. A moment more, and we would have been on our road to freedom. If a child's voice has so much influence with you, I must have greatly mistaken your feelings.'

The tears gathered in her eyes; she looked from the treacherous face she had loved, to that bold and truthful one of her boyish champion.

'You know my heart,' she said; 'to my bitter cost I can say that. If my life were

my own to deal with as I pleased, I—I might only remember that I loved you. But it has other claims and other duties.' Then her voice broke. She turned to Basil and clasped his arm convulsively. 'Take me home,' she cried; 'oh, take me home! I can't bear more.'

A man's soul seemed to leap into the boyish eyes as they flashed defiance at the mean and cruel scoundrel, to whom a woman's weakness meant only a plea for her destruction.

'You hear!' he said. 'It is her wish to leave you. Have you anything to say?'

For an instant Pierre raised his hand, as if to silence with its strength this audacious young defender of his cousin's honour.

But Nancette stayed him.

'Touch him if you dare?' she said. 'It will neither help your cause, nor alter my decision.'

'Let him do what he likes,' said Basil haughtily; 'I'm not afraid, big as he is. But perhaps he won't care to face your husband. He's on his way here.'

Pierre de Volens turned ashy pale. He gave one rapid glance up at the cliffs and the rocky path. Then, without a word of farewell, he turned away and went rapidly along the shingly beach to where the little boat lay moored.

Nancette stood and watched him—her eyes anxious and full of pain, her hands clasped tight against her breast.

It seemed to her he must look back, give some sign of remembrance or regret—he whose burning words seemed yet upon the air, and echoing again and again in her ears. A strange revulsion of feeling shook her. Could they part thus—they for whom life now was as a blank and dreary desert? Part coldly, cruelly, knowing of days to come when heart would crave for heart, and face for sight of face. Surely he would look back once—only once!

His steps quickened. He was on the rocks, crossing from group to group towards the little boat. Suddenly she remembered it must have been brought there for her—to

bear her to freedom, life, love, delight—all that he had painted and promised.

A low cry escaped her lips; she tried to call, but her voice was husky and indistinct.

'It is good-bye for ever,' she said; 'for ever! Oh, the pain—the cruel—cruel pain!'

'It is better than his love,' said the voice beside her. 'Oh, Lady Nancye, can't you read him better? He is a selfish coward—not worth a thought. No, don't cry like that. Your tears are too good to be wasted on such a brute.'

'Don't!' she cried passionately. 'What do you know—a boy like you?'

His face flushed.

'Yes,' he said, 'I am only a boy to you. I ought not to feel angry at your folly, I suppose. But I think you'll be glad one day that only I know of it.'

'Oh, forgive me?' she said, weeping passionately now. 'You have saved me, Basil—I know it; but I am not even grateful. I am a wicked woman. I am not fit for you to associate with!'

'You are nothing of the sort,' said the boy gently and decidedly; 'and I love you just the same, and I'll stand up for you always. But you must dry your eyes, and look like yourself, for Mr. Glendenning is waiting to speak to you. He won't go to the house, and I promised to bring you.'

'Where did you see him? I thought you were in church,' she said, bewildered and frightened at the news.

'I was on my way there, when I had a fancy to come back and look after you,' said the boy coolly. 'So I had a sudden fit of toothache, got out of the waggonette, and came home. I found you'd gone out, so I followed. In the woods I met Mr. Glendenning, looking like a wandering ghost. He said he wouldn't go to the house, he wished no one to know of his visit, but could I bring you to him? Thereupon I started to look for you, and stumbled on you here.'

She had dried her eyes now. She was pale and trembling, but composed.

'Let us go,' she said, and put her hand in his, and with one shuddering glance at the distant speck on the wide, blue waters, went slowly and silently up the rocky path.

CHAPTER V.

If a wall of ice had been built up round her heart, Nancette could not have felt colder—harder—stranger than she did. Her brain seemed numbed and dazed. She was like one walking in semi-consciousness after a heavy blow.

The boy looked anxiously at her again and again. Her intense quiet, the strained look in her eyes, the rigid pallor of her face, frightened him. In silence he dared not break he walked beside her, till they reached the wood which formed the boundary of Owl's Roost.

Pacing to and fro between the dark tree-stems was a man of some five-and-thirty years. He was tall, but he stooped slightly ; his face was worn and delicate—the face of a student

and a dreamer. Now it wore a look of repressed suffering, a look that changed to a momentary anguish as he saw that slender figure coming towards him, with the delicate tracery of leafy shadow upon her white gown and down-bent face. He stood motionless waiting for her to approach.

He gave her no greeting, only turned to the boy with a chill sternness that awed him.

'Go home now,' he said, 'and remember your promise.'

The boy drew back a step, looking anxiously from one to the other of those two strangely-mated beings. Then he lifted the cap from his fair curls, and moved slowly and thoughtfully away through the narrow wooded glade.

Nancette stood before her husband like a culprit before a judge. She could utter no word. She only waited to hear what he would say.

'I sent for you,' he began abruptly, 'because I am leaving this country altogether,

for—for a long time. When I wrote to you, I told you I would do all that was necessary for your comfort. I have placed a sum of money in your name, in the county bank. You can draw on it as you please; for the rest all household arrangements will be in Deborah's hands. The boys are going to school. They are too old to run wild here any longer; but they may come home for the holidays—if you wish.'

She broke the spell of constraint then.

'Must they go away?' she cried piteously. 'It will be so sad—so lonely without them.'

'I cannot help that,' answered Errol Glendenning sternly. 'I have a duty to fulfil to them, and I must obey my trust. Whatever your life is,' he went on, looking at her with cold and wrathful eyes, 'remember, you have brought its sufferings on yourself. Why were you not open with me? Do you think, if I had known your secret, I, or any honest man, would have made you his wife? Your father deceived me; so did you. I was a fool, and I suited your purpose, no doubt. So you

chose me for that purpose, without regard to the life and hopes you were ruining.'

She did not speak. Her head was half turned from him. The beautiful profile, cut clearly as a cameo, stood between him and the wavering shadows. He could not read the acute pain, the set and heart-broken anguish of the sad young face.

'You accepted me for your husband,' he went on bitterly, 'knowing that you held locked within your heart a shameful secret. I gave you my whole heart in full trust, and how did you repay me?'

'Stop!' she said, turning round, and facing him with sudden desperation. 'You don't know all; you don't know how I, too, was trapped and deceived; how——'

He silenced her with a gesture.

'You have condemned yourself,' he said. 'I do know all. I know that I can never look upon you as my wife, and yet, legally, I see no way to set you free. My promise to the dead binds me; my vows to you bind me. I must shelter you, protect you, defend you

alike from the man who has wronged you and the man you have wronged. Pierre de Volens was a villain and a cheat, yet to this villain you have given your heart, and in his keeping is your secret.'

'If I had foreseen this hour,' she murmured brokenly; 'if only I had been less ignorant, less trustful——'

'Heaven knows I can echo those words from the bottom of my heart,' he said; 'but the regret is as useless as the reproach. I served your purpose, and—his. I only stand before you as a shadow. Yet I tell you that a day will surely come when you will know your father's judgment was correct —that you would be happier in your coffin than as the wife of this man. But my words won't carry much weight now. I know that to my cost. It was not you that Pierre de Volens sought, but your fortune. To baffle him I was made your father's tool. I am the guardian of that fortune and of you. In three years' time you will be of age. On the day you are twenty-one I will be here to

deliver my trust into your hands. You will then be free to act as you please. Nor shall I compel you to live under my roof unless you desire it. This is what I came to say to you to-day. No doubt your life will be dreary, but for that you alone are to blame. I cannot introduce you to society as my wife, knowing what I know. I cannot suffer shame and scandal to attach themselves to an honoured name, even for sake of the infatuation that has broken my heart and home. We are man and wife by the laws of heaven and man, but in all else we stand apart as the veriest strangers. If you rebel against your own fate, remember to what you have condemned me. You chose to keep your secret, but chance discovered it to me. For sake of your treachery we both must suffer, till death cuts the knot for one or other.'

She bent her head on her clasped hands in a sudden storm of tears.

'You are very hard on me,' she said. 'My youth, my ignorance, might plead excuse with you as they did in my father's eyes.'

'Nothing,' he said sternly, 'can excuse deception.'

'Perhaps,' she pleaded, amid her broken sobs, 'if you knew all——'

'I do know all,' he said, growing deathly white. 'That night revealed it to me. Clearer proof is not necessary. Had it been, I could have procured it from—Julie Lamontaine.'

Her hands fell. She looked at him in terror.

'From—her!' she gasped. 'How did you know of her?'

'That,' he answered bitterly, 'is my affair.'

'Have you seen her—did she tell you——'

'She told me,' he interposed coldly and relentlessly, 'all I wished to know; she told me enough to make me regret, to the last hour of my life, the fate that made me your father's friend.'

She shivered as with sudden cold.

'He was right, then,' she said slowly; 'he told me if anyone ever knew——'

Again that sudden, passionate gesture stopped her.

'Don't put it into words,' he said; 'the truth is horrible enough.'

She did not answer, only turned her head aside, while the hot colour stole up to her brow and crimsoned even the delicate shell-like ears that were alone visible to him.

After a moment's silence he spoke again.

'Although I condemn you,' he said, 'I pity you. I pity you all the more, because I know what manner of man has won your heart, and made me the cloak of his vile designs. But, no doubt, in your eyes he is a hero still. Women are so blind where they love. So much trust I have in you that I believe you will respect my wishes, and close my doors against this man. Perhaps these years of absence may plead as desertion in the eyes of the law, and give you back your freedom with your fortune. In that case you may still be happy in your own way. I can do no more for you.'

'Oh,' she cried between her bitter sobs,

'you have done too much already. I see my folly and my blindness now. Have pity on me. You are a man, and strong, and full of purpose. I—oh, I am so pitifully weak. Only to-day I have deceived you again. I know your doors are closed to him; but for all that I have seen him. We met by the sea not two hours ago. How can I escape him? He is relentless, and—you—you leave me alone.'

For a moment he turned white as death.

'You mean to tell me,' he said, 'that—*that* man has been here to-day?'

She bent her head; she could not speak now for weeping.

'And you met him—not accidentally, but with full purpose, knowing what has been between you—knowing that I have forbidden his presence?'

'I met him,' she said brokenly, 'for the last time. I have parted from him for ever. Oh, be generous enough to pity and forgive me! Let me try to do what is right and what you wish. I was motherless from my

cradle—I have had no one to love or help me. And you—you call yourself my husband, yet you forsake me too!'

He stood there quite silent, battling with a storm of outraged pride, and crushed love, and hopes now doomed to be for ever unfulfilled.

Yet that piteous appeal—that sight of weak and suffering womanhood—wrung his very heart.

'It is true,' he said, and his voice shook with emotion. 'I am your husband. It is my duty to help and protect you, if you claim it——'

'Oh no—no!' she broke out passionately. 'I claim nothing — nothing. I am not worth a thought of yours. I have done you a cruel wrong. It is but just I should suffer.'

'Your sufferings,' he said bitterly, 'can scarcely equal mine. But let that pass. I will not leave you alone. You shall have a friend to stay here with you, and keep you company in your loneliness. Besides, it will

be some protection. Will you trust me to arrange this?'

'Yes,' she answered unsteadily. 'I will obey whatever you desire.'

'Except with regard to your cousin,' he said sternly. 'There your powers of obedience seem to fail you altogether.'

'They never will again,' she said, and turned her white, despairing face to heaven, as if registering there a vow her heart had sworn. 'I promise you never again to meet, or speak to him, of my own free will!'

'Until, as I said before, you are of age to dispose of yourself and your fortune,' he answered. 'By that time I hope you may have gained some judgment and firmness of purpose. I—I think now there is no more to be said. The lady I will send you as companion is a widow—a young, and graceful, and accomplished woman, and a woman who will be a true friend.' From time to time I will send you news of me and my welfare. You may answer my letters or not, as you please. For the rest, I bid you farewell now

until the day mentioned in your father's letter to me.'

She looked timidly, almost entreatingly, at him.

'If you could only say,' she pleaded, 'that you trust me, or will try to trust me, I think that would give me courage.'

As he met that piteous gaze, the hard crust about his heart seemed broken through as with the scorch of fire. How he had loved this girl! he thought; and yet, as he met her eyes, he only looked into a soul that had never met his own—that now, it seemed, never could meet it, while life should drag its days of weariness along the path their feet must tread.

'I cannot say it,' he said. 'For I cannot trust you.'

Her eyes looked sorrowfully back to his

'I cannot blame you,' she said. 'I shall not blame you even in my years of penance. I—I feel I have treated you with unspeakable cruelty. I don't ask or expect you to forgive me. I will pray that freedom may

come to you. I do not want to live. I am so unhappy. If I could only die young as my mother did!'

Those words smote him to the heart. For long years they were to haunt him as memory recalled his life's mistake and all its bitter suffering. But he answered her coldly:

'Do not wish for death; it is unwise. When most desired, it never approaches. And now—good-bye.'

She stretched out her hand. Her eyes were red with weeping; her face looked almost terrible in its tragic pain.

He touched her hand, but it seemed as if a wall of ice were between them. No life or warmth was in that chilly pressure. Then, without a word, he turned away, and was lost in the shadows of the wood.

She stood there quite still, and watched him till he was out of sight. The tears were still wet upon her lashes; her mouth seemed set in a line of rigid despair. The events of this one day had taken all the youth from

her face, though they could not destroy its beauty.

At last she turned away and went homewards. A sort of longing had come over her to escape from the mocking sunlight, the clear sky, the glad trills of the birds.

She craved for solitude, and darkness, and rest. Her brain seemed on fire, her heart throbbed tumultuously.

Existence seemed to her like an awful burden laid upon unwilling shoulders, and she found herself dimly wondering how her strength would be equal to the task of bearing it.

She stood on the threshold of life, and yet that life had all gone wrong. It was her own fault. She had only herself to blame; but that thought did not help her in this hour, nor would it in any hour that was yet to come.

As she hurried through the hall she met Basil. He was waiting for her. He stepped forward, but she waved him hurriedly aside.

'Not now,' she said. 'I can't bear it. I must be alone.'

The boy stood motionless. Her face frightened him; but he did not attempt to resist her appeal. She almost staggered as she went up the stairs in that frenzied, feverish fashion. Listening, he heard the door of her room closed and locked; then all was silent.

'I suppose,' he said half to himself, 'she is crying. All women cry when they are in trouble. But I wish—oh, I wish *she* wouldn't!'

Something rolled down his own face on to his hand. Not a tear—for the pride and sake of dawning manhood, it could not be that!

But the boy's heart was sore within him as he went sadly through the corridor to the old shabby playroom, where Stewart was patiently awaiting him.

CHAPTER VI.

That long miserable Sunday was drawing to a close.

Basil had kept his word religiously. No one knew that Mr. Glendenning had been in the neighbourhood; no one knew of that strange interview in the wood. Nancette had kept her room. The boys had dined alone, and spent the afternoon in aimless wandering about the grounds.

Stewart saw that something had affected his brother's usual spirits, and kept him subdued and anxious, but as Basil declared nothing was the matter, he felt in duty bound to accept that statement as correct. They had tea with Deborah, and listened to her as she read out the 'Pilgrim's Progress' as an unfailing Sunday treat; but even she noticed

how listless and dispirited the elder boy was, and audibly expressed a fear that he was sickening for something.

It was getting dusk. The blue of the sky had turned to sober grey. The birds had all sought their nests for the night.

It was too dark to read, and Deborah was talking softly to Stewart in the corner by the fire. Basil could bear the suspense no longer. He stole quietly out of the room, and went to that locked door about which his thoughts had lingered all these hours, and stood there listening. Not a sound was audible. The silence frightened him. Once before he remembered he had stood like that before a closed and silent chamber. When it opened, they had told him his young mother lay within dead.

In sudden desperation he knocked. For a moment all was still. Then came the faint, soft rustle of a woman's dress over the carpeted floor. The door was opened. He saw the room all dark and shadowy, and a white figure standing motionless before him.

'Don't be angry,' he said imploringly. 'I felt I must see you. I couldn't bear it any longer. May I come in?'

She moved aside.

'Yes,' she said, faintly and wearily. 'I—I intended to send for you, only somehow I had not courage.'

He closed the door behind him, then took her hand and led her to the broad, old-fashioned window-seat. There was no fire in the grate, nor any light in the room save that from the pale grey sky, where now a star or two was shining.

'Have you been crying all day?' he asked. 'And you've had nothing to eat. Don't you think you're very silly?'

'Deborah brought me some tea,' she said. 'I can't eat—food seems to choke me.' She laid her burning forehead against the boy's cool hands. 'You are very good to think of me,' she said. 'I wonder what I shall do when you leave me?'

'I'm not going to leave you,' he said sturdily; 'I've told you so, often and

often. Someone must take care of you, you know.'

'But your—I mean Mr. Glendenning, said that you and Stewart were to go to school—somewhere away from here.'

'To school!' he cried, aghast at the information. 'Oh, surely he can't mean it! What a shame! And just as we were all going to be so jolly together. Tell me,' he added, dropping his voice, 'is he coming to live here again?'

She sadly shook her head.

'No; and it is all my fault. Oh, Basil, if I only could live my life over again—if I only—only—could!'

The boy was silent, too startled for words, yet vaguely conscious that he understood why that yearning cry had escaped her—why she looked out on life, and saw it blurred and blotted by a first mistake.

'I think,' he said at last, 'you had better give up all thoughts of that other fellow. He's a mean cur! He's no business to come sneaking after another man's wife, even if

there is a screw loose between them! Some day, things are sure to come right between Mr. Glendenning and you. He's no end of a good fellow, when you know him. But, if you encourage that cousin of yours, there'll be mischief. Take my word for it!'

'I have promised never to see him again—of my own free will,' she said despairingly. 'You are too young to understand all this; but I am grateful for your sympathy. I don't know what I should have done without you to-day.'

'Yes,' he said with a short laugh; 'my toothache came in useful. But, oh! I wish I wasn't going to school. Won't you be awfully dull all alone here?'

'Mr. Glendenning said he was going to send some one to live with me,' she answered. 'Some widow-lady—a friend of his. Do you know who it can be?'

'Not unless it's Mrs. Freere; but I can hardly believe that.'

'Why, is she old, or ugly, or disagreeable?'

asked the girl listlessly. 'It will not matter, even if she is.'

'Oh, she's all that, and more!' laughed the boy. 'Wait till you see her. I hope I'll be here when she comes. Did Mr. Glendenning say when we were to go to school?'

'No. He is to write to you. Probably you will hear to-morrow.'

'Can we come home for the holidays?'

'I believe so. Oh, surely if you wish it.'

'Wish it! I should just think I did. Will you write to me sometimes, Lady Nancye?'

'Yes, dear,' she said gently. 'You know you are my only friend—my brave young champion. I wish I had had a brother like you. I might have made a better thing of my life.'

'You must let me be your brother,' he said; then after a pause he added: 'Lady Nancye, did you tell Mr. Glendenning about—about meeting your cousin to-day?'

'Yes.'

'I'm glad of that,' he said quickly; 'I shouldn't have any secrets from him, if I were

you. I'm quite sure I wouldn't like my wife to have any from me.'

'Your wife!'

The girl's white lips quivered faintly, but she was too weak and too heart-sick for mirth.

'I should like to marry someone just like you,' he went on.

'As pale,' she asked, 'and as wicked?'

'I don't believe you're wicked—I'm sure you're not.'

'Indeed I am,' sh esaid drearily; 'very, very wicked.'

'Then,' he said, calmly, 'wicked people must be nicer than good ones.'

'You are a droll boy; but you always cheer me up,' she said, smiling faintly. 'But now I am going to send you away. I am too tired to talk more. I will go to bed and see if I can sleep for once.'

'Don't you always sleep?' he asked anxiously.

'No; very seldom of late. But to-night I am worn out. I only want to rest, and not think.'

'Shall I send Deborah?' he asked, rising and looking at her with those honest young eyes, which she loved yet feared.

'No,' she said; 'tell her I have gone to bed. I do not want her, or anyone.'

She held out her hand to him.

'Kiss me, my little knight,' she said. 'I wish I could tell you how grateful I am!'

She did not say for what, but he knew well enough. Knew that but for his intervention she would not have been sitting here now —sheltered, safe, even if unhappy and alone.

He bent down. The shadowy dusk hid the flush upon his cheeks as his lips touched her cold brow. He did not speak, his heart was too full. That kiss was as a seal set upon his life, to keep it pure, and chivalrous, and reverential to all womanhood for sake of one.

'Heaven bless you, dear!' she said.

But he was silent. For the second time that day the smart of tears was on his eyelids as he left her presence.

A week had passed.

It was close on sunset, and the two young Glendennings were sitting astride the tall iron gates that shut out the precincts of Owl's Roost from the main road. Their faces were full of expectation.

'I am sure I heard wheels,' remarked Stewart for about the twentieth time in the course of as many minutes. 'Yes, this time I am right. Look there it comes. I see her face.'

In a second he was down, and had flung open the gate and fastened it back. The carriage stopped, a lady looked out of the window.

'How are you both?' she said. 'Have you come to meet me?'

'Of course,' said Basil. 'Get out of the carriage and walk up the avenue with us, will you? We've such lots to tell you.'

The lady spoke to the driver, and then opened the door and came up to the boys and kissed them warmly.

'How well you both look,' she said; 'and

how you've grown! Now what's all this wonderful news?'

'You know, of course,' said Basil, 'that Mr. Glendenning's married?'

'Yes,' she said, and a sort of constrained look came over her face; 'he told me that.'

'But why he should have got married at all, I don't see,' went on Basil, 'for he's never stayed here, and now he's gone off for years, I believe. Did he tell you why, Mrs. Freere?'

'No; only for reasons that were imperative,' he said.

'I can't make it out,' said Basil. 'And she's such an angel.'

'What is she like?' asked Mrs. Freere, not curiously, but with that same constraint of face and voice that had marked her previous question.

'Like! Well, she's very young, and very white, and——'

'She's just like the picture of the lady Nancye in our playroom,' said Stewart eagerly. 'Basil calls her that. And she's very sad

always. But Basil is awfully fond of her, and she is very good to us.'

'And Mr. Glendenning's going to send us to school, and we have to leave to-morrow,' said Basil; 'and what she'll do without us I don't know. It's a shame. That's why I wanted to see you, Mrs. Freere—just to put you up to what you ought to do, you know. Because, of course, she doesn't know you like we do, and she's so unhappy, and so—so different to anybody else.'

'Is she?' asked Mrs. Freere, somewhat listlessly. 'I imagined that for myself.'

'Quite different,' went on Basil. 'But you're sure to like her, and I know you'll be a friend to her. Did Mr. Glendenning tell you there was a screw loose?'

'A what?' she exclaimed, standing still in sheer astonishment to look at the boy.

'A screw loose—something wrong between them. I don't, of course, know anything about married people, but I should imagine they didn't behave quite like these do.'

Mrs. Freere's face flushed.

'Perhaps,' she said, 'Mr. Glendenning only married her out of pity for her forlorn condition, and then found out he had made a mistake.'

Basil shook his head.

'No,' he said; 'he was very fond of her. I can't make out why he left her almost as soon as he brought her here.'

'He—he did not tell me that,' said Mrs. Freere in a low voice.

'Perhaps he was ashamed of himself,' said Basil loftily. 'I know I should have been. However, perhaps things will come right some day. No one knows he's married yet, and——'

'Do you mean,' she interrupted, 'that it is a secret? That no one knows this—this girl is his wife?'

'That is exactly it. The servants have been sent away, and only Deborah and old Clitheroe know of the marriage. The others think she's a ward of Mr. Glendenning's, like we are.'

'It is very extraordinary,' said Mrs. Freere; 'very extraordinary!'

'Oh, you'll cheer her up, I've no doubt,' said Basil hopefully. 'Women, of course, understand women. I've done my best, but this whim of sending us to school has spoilt all my plans. So I must just trust to you. I know you're awfully good, and I'm glad you've not gone out to America, as you threatened. Did your affairs come right, and did you get your dollars?'

'Some,' she said, smiling faintly. 'Enough to live on. I won't trouble about the rest.'

'And are you going to live here, now?' asked Stewart.

'I have promised Mr. Glendenning to stay with his wife until he returns,' she answered gravely; 'unless, of course, she wishes me to leave her. But I hope he will not be away more than a year.'

'Perhaps,' suggested Basil, 'you can find out what's gone wrong, and bring them together again.'

'That,' she said, flushing faintly, 'is my earnest wish and desire. Life is too short to be made altogether wretched by a mistake,

and it can be only a mistake that has caused this—this estrangement.'

'Of course,' said Basil loyally. 'Nothing else in the world.' Then he looked at her admiringly. 'You are just the sort of woman,' he said, 'to do her good. Mr. Glendenning says you are a "universal helper."'

'You seem to have constituted yourself her champion, at all events,' said Mrs. Freere. 'I hope she is duly grateful. I suppose,' she added, looking anxiously at the house, which was now in sight, 'she expects me to-day?'

'I heard her telling Deborah about your room,' answered Basil. 'You are to have the room next hers. She was putting flowers there this morning.'

'That was nice of her,' said Mrs. Freere thoughtfully. 'How strange the house looks with that crimson light on it!' she added; 'as if it were in a sea of fire.'

'Or blood,' suggested Basil.

'What a horrible idea!' she said with a

shudder. 'Oh,' hurriedly, 'who is that standing there all in white?'

'That,' said Basil proudly, 'is my Ladye Nancye. She's coming to meet us.'

CHAPTER VII.

With the red glow of the sunset upon her uncovered head and the floating folds of her white dress, Nancette advanced to meet her visitor.

Had she known with what strange interest Myra Freere regarded her, it might have made her more nervous than she was. She greeted her shyly—almost coldly. She was wondering how much of her history this woman knew, and what she thought of it.

In five minutes' time she had forgotten she had any peculiar history for her to know. Mrs. Freere had that greatest of feminine charms—a sympathetic manner. Looking at her, on first acquaintance, no one would have thought of calling her beautiful—conversing with her for ten minutes, anyone would have

decided she was ten times more attractive than any merely beautiful woman. She was tall and slight, and very graceful. She had large, clear, grey eyes, that often looked black under the shadow of their long lashes. Her mouth, nose, and complexion were ordinary. Her hair was of soft, warm, chestnut-brown, and waved back from her forehead in a natural rippling line; her eyes and hair formed her only claim to beauty. She was serious but not melancholy—grave but not gloomy.

Nancette found herself looking at her again and again, as they walked up to the house. She half wondered how she could feel so cordially disposed to an utter stranger, and a woman who, for the sake of her friendship with Mr. Glendenning, might be passing harsh and critical judgment upon his wife.

'I will show you to your room,' she said as they entered the hall. 'I hope you will like it. But all the rooms here are gloomy.'

'That is the penalty one pays for an ancestral residence,' said Mrs. Freere, with that soft, grave smile upon her lips that gave

its sweetest expression to her face. 'I never possessed one myself, unfortunately. It is always a comfort, therefore, to discover they have drawbacks.'

'I—I am not fond of gloom,' said the girl seriously. 'I thought this whole place terrible when first I saw it. Of course, I am more used to it now, and the boys make it lively sometimes. It will be very melancholy when there is no young life in it.'

'There is yours!' said Mrs. Freere involuntarily. But as she met Nancette's quick, pained glance, she felt she had said the wrong thing.

They did not speak again till they reached the bedroom.

'You have done your best to banish gloom,' Mrs. Freere then said, looking round at the flowers, and lace, and feminine decorations. 'Why did you take so much trouble?' she added, taking the small white hands in her own, and looking straight into the shy and sorrowful eyes.

'Trouble!' echoed Nancette. 'Oh, if you

only knew how dreary it is—how long the days are!'

'We must alter all that,' said Mrs. Freere gravely. 'I have come to be a friend to you, my dear; and I mean to be one. A woman always understands a woman, and when both have known sorrow, it helps them to get on better, I think.'

Nancette went over to the window, and stood there looking out. The dying glow of the sunset still lingered over the trees; but her eyes never saw it, or indeed anything. Her heart was beating too painfully for speech.

Myra Freere had taken off her bonnet and travelling-cloak, and washed the dust of her journey from her face and hands, before the girl turned to her again. She met a face and smile that seemed to her almost divine in their beauty, and tenderness, and compassion.

'I—I beg your pardon,' she said timidly. 'I should have asked if you required anything. I forgot myself for a moment.'

'That was a long thought,' said Mrs.

Freere. 'But I am glad you do not intend to be ceremonious. I should not like it, and I am not used to it.'

'Shall we go down and have some tea?' asked Nancette. 'I expect the boys are getting impatient. It is their last day, and they want as much of me as they can get.'

'I am quite ready,' answered Mrs. Freere. 'How fond Basil is of you!' she added.

'Yes,' said Nancette with a sigh. 'And he is such a nice boy. I wish he was not going away.'

'If he were not a nice boy,' said Mrs. Freere, 'there would be nothing to regret in the advent of school-life. But you are right. He is delightful as boys go, and you can't help missing him.'

She looked at Nancette as she spoke with highly critical attention. She was marvelling at the girl's beauty, and the strangeness of her fate.

'It must be something very grave that a husband could not forgive—her,' she thought.

A wood-fire burnt in the open fireplace of

the great hall. Tea was waiting, so were the boys and their two rough terriers, Floss and Boss, who for this last day had been privileged to go wherever their young masters went.

'We're quite ready for tea,' said Basil, setting his Ladye Nancye's chair opposite the tray. 'I told Debbie to bring plenty of hot cakes. I thought Mrs. Freere would be hungry.'

'Of course it was only Mrs. Freere's appetite that required consideration,' said the visitor; 'schoolboys are never addicted to such weaknesses as cakes.'

'I'll tell you when I am one,' said Basil coolly, as he brought her her tea. 'Won't you two just be longing for Midsummer—that's all.'

'Why Midsummer?' asked Nancette, looking at him wonderingly.

'Because then we shall have holidays,' said the boy.

'You seem to pity us very much for the loss of your society,' said Myra Freere. 'I

don't know that it is quite an unmixed evil.' Then she smiled at the boy's handsome face. 'You are rather conceited, Master Basil. School will soon take that out of you.'

'I wonder what it will be like,' said Stewart musingly.

'Well,' said Myra Freere, 'there are schools and schools. At some you learn nothing, at others a good deal. I have heard of fathers paying at the rate of four hundred a year that a boy may learn to discriminate in the matter of cigars and hats.'

'Oh!' said Basil thoughtfully. 'Well, I'm not fond of grinding, I must say. Stewart's the one for that. Besides, they teach you such a lot of unnecessary stuff. Look at old Chasable now. All he thinks of is Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew. What's the good of it?'

'A necessary part of the education of a gentleman,' said Myra Freere demurely.

Basil pulled Boss's ears reflectively.

'I'd like to be an explorer,' he said; 'I can't stand grinding at desks or work. The

wilder the life the better I should like it. Did you ever see a prairie when you were in America?' he asked abruptly.

'America,' said Mrs. Freere, 'is a large country. I was only in New York. I never went West. But I would have made an effort to see a prairie,' she went on, setting down her cup and looking gravely at her young questioner, 'if I had thought it would be a matter of importance to you.'

'One reads about them, you know,' said the boy. 'I should like to hear from some one who has seen them, if the books are correct.'

'Books are always correct,' said Nancette gravely.

'No,' said Myra Freere, looking quietly at the delicate, pale face, 'not always. Intentions are good, but sometimes fall short in the carrying out. Adventurous life has been greatly exaggerated. It is not wholesome reading.'

'It is the only reading I care for,' said Basil, taking his cup round to be replenished

for the third time. 'If I were Mr. Glendenning, I should go straight off to the Rocky Mountains and shoot grizzlies and wild Indians, and have no end of a jolly life.'

There was an awkward pause. Then Myra Freere spoke in her soft, low voice:

'Your future will doubtless be very different to what you now imagine or desire,' she said. 'The young are always irrational. But you may be very sure that you will never choose at thirty what you would at thirteen.'

'Thirty!' cried Basil. 'Oh, but that's awfully old.'

She smiled. She turned her beautiful calm eyes upon him.

'I,' she said, 'am thirty.'

The boy flushed hotly.

'Are you? Well, of course you're not old. I mean you don't look it. But it does seem a long way off to me now, you know.'

'No doubt,' answered Mrs. Freere gravely. 'And sometimes I feel as old as you fancy you would. But it isn't the years that age us,' she went on in her low, even tones; 'it

is what those years bring. Troubles are sure to come, but the capacity of bearing them varies much. To some it is very, very hard. If you have a sensitive conscience, and emotions, life is harder for you. It seems to go wrong so easily.'

'I don't see why anyone's life should go wrong,' said Basil sturdily. 'We can do pretty much as we like with it.'

'Ah,' said Mrs. Freere quietly, 'you will perhaps make a different confession when you, too, are thirty.'

There was a short silence. Nancette rose from her seat almost abruptly. The boys looked uncomfortable. They finished their tea, and then Stewart suggested they should see if Deborah had packed up their books.

Nancette and Myra Freere were left alone.

'Come and sit down here,' said the latter, pointing to a low and softly-cushioned chair beside her. 'Don't ring for lights yet. Let us have a talk.'

The girl took the seat at once. Her face looked intensely sad in the light of the dim

wood fire. Her hands were listlessly folded upon her knees.

'If we are to be friends,' said Mrs. Freere gently, 'as I trust and hope we shall, I must be perfectly candid and open with you. I have known Mr. Glendenning since I was a girl, though my marriage parted us for years. I went to America with my husband; he remained here. When I was left a widow, I came back to my old home. It is some miles away from here—a mere cottage facing the sea. I was quite alone in the world. Mr. Glendenning and I resumed our old friendship. When he told me that he was about to put that friendship to a test, I was glad of it. He said that circumstances he could not explain obliged him to leave his young wife for a time—that it was very lonely for her here—that she needed not only a companion but a friend, and in all the world he knew of no one who would be both to her, and yet respect her secret, and the sorrow that was her portion. I listened, and my heart went out to you, for, oh, child, I too have drunk the cup of sorrow

to its dregs, and I thought my own experience might help yours.'

She paused. Nancette still looked at the fire; she felt as if she could not trust herself to speak.

'I said to him, "Do not tell me anything; I will go to her if she will have me."'

She paused again. Nancette turned her head, and looked at her, but she did not speak. It almost seemed as if she were holding herself back for fear that words would break from her despite herself.

'I have come to you,' went on the tenderly modulated voice, 'because you are in a strait which only a woman can understand—because you have neither mother, nor sister, nor friend—because you stand on the threshold of life, and all your future happiness depends on the step you take. But,' she added gently, 'you shall tell me nothing that you do not wish. I don't make my friendship or my help the reward of a forced confidence. You are only a child in comparison to myself—only a child, and yet——'

'And yet,' broke in Nancette, her voice trembling and broken, 'how I have suffered —oh, how I have suffered!'

'It is a woman's lot,' said Mrs. Freere, 'and we cannot evade it!'

'Then,' said the girl unsteadily, 'you too——'

'I, too,' interposed Myra Freere, 'have had my experience. It might have made me hard. I am glad it has only made me pitiful.'

'I think,' said the girl sorrowfully, 'I could bear mine better if I did not see so clearly it was all my own fault. There is nothing palliating about it. It is only foolish and humiliating.'

'Most mistakes are,' said Mrs. Freere, 'when we look back upon them. We don't see their true nature till then.'

The tears rose to Nancette's eyes.

'You have done me good,' she said. 'I do not want to get hard; but I should in time if I were alone. Some day I will try to tell you; I can't yet. It is—oh, it is much

worse than you think. All good women would turn from me if they knew. My fault is beyond forgiveness. Did not my husband tell you that?'

'If he had,' said Myra Freere gently, 'I should not have believed him. Looking at you now, I cannot believe you.'

'Indeed, you are too charitable,' said the girl, while the slow tears dropped one by one on her clasped hands. 'I have no right here, and my sin has driven him away. Only that I am too cowardly and too ignorant to face the world, I would not remain. But,' she added hopefully, 'it is only for three years. I shall soon be eighteen, and on the very day I am twenty-one, he will set me free!'

'Set you free!' echoed Mrs. Freere in a puzzled voice. 'But he cannot; you are his wife!'

'He says three years' desertion will be a plea in the eyes of the law,' said the girl.

'Desertion!' cried Myra Freere indignantly. 'He—Errol Glendenning—the soul

of honour, capable of so forgetting duty and morality! Impossible! Why, child, if you had been the worst of women, he could not have humiliated you more! There must be some terrible mistake here. Why do you not clear it up?'

'Because,' she said, 'it is hopeless; you would say so if you knew all.'

'The worst mistakes can be put right,' said Myra Freere gently; 'and the greatest sins may be forgiven. I never thought Errol Glendenning was a merciless or a harsh man—far from it,' she added, with a faint flush stealing over her eager face. 'He is the very soul of chivalry and gentleness. His nature is very sensitive, I know; but it is serious and deeply tender, and if he loved you——'

'He did,' said the girl sorrowfully; 'that, I think, is what makes it so hard.'

'When one loves,' said Myra Freere, 'forgiveness should be easy if it is sought in the right way.'

'I did not seek it in the right way,' said

Nancette sadly. 'I think I was frightened when I saw what I had done.'

'Tell me one thing,' said Mrs. Freere, bending forward in the firelight, and looking anxiously at the girl's white, sorrowful face. 'Did you love him?'

'No,' she said quite simply, but a faint shiver shook her slight young form; 'oh no, I did not love—him.'

'Then,' said Mrs. Freere, drawing back and flushing hotly, 'there was some one else?'

'Yes,' answered Nancette, her face hidden now by her clasped and trembling hands; 'there was—some one else!'

CHAPTER VIII.

'Five o'clock!' shouted Basil, throwing a pillow across the room at his sleeping brother. 'Do wake up! You know we have to make our pilgrimage.'

Stewart opened his eyes and yawned sleepily. The sun was streaming in, and he lay for some moments blinking at it, and lazily watching his more energetic brother's proceedings. They had made a compact the previous night to rise early and take a farewell of all their favourite haunts and pets and belongings.

Some half-hour later they were in the stable-yard, the two dogs following at their heels. The thought that this was the last morning, for a long time to come, when they should wander at their own sweet will, somewhat sobered the boys.

Basil was unusually silent, and Stewart's heart was too full for anything but tears. They fed the pony, and stroked his glossy coat with gentler touch than that they usually bestowed. The pigeons came flocking round them, strutting to and fro in the sunlight with their pretty rosy feet. The rabbits in the hutch rubbed their soft noses against the hands that gave them their early breakfast.

They left the live-stock at last, and went into the kitchen-garden, and thence into the wood, still damp with dew, and odorous with the breath of spring flowers. The warm spring sunlight was streaming through the boughs; the birds were chirping and twittering in the trees, giving vent to glad thanksgiving for the beauty of the fresh, sweet day. The boys seated themselves on one of the low branches of a spreading oak, and soberly and gravely surveyed the scene.

'It will seem a long time to Midsummer,' said Stewart mournfully.

'Yes,' said Basil. 'I dare say school won't

be so bad, but it's the breaking off here I don't like. Things never seem the same once you leave them.'

'I think,' said Stewart, nodding his head in the direction of the house, 'that if—she—had not come here we should never have been sent away. Nothing has been the same since.'

'I—I don't mind that,' said Basil loyally. 'She's worth putting up with bothers for. No; I think it's some fad Mr. Glendenning has taken up. I dare say he'll be sorry some day.'

'He might have let us remain here,' murmured Stewart plaintively. 'I never wanted to go away. Old Chasable taught us quite enough.'

'Perhaps,' said Basil, laughing, 'he suggested school by way of revenge. We've plagued him a good deal lately.'

'I should think Jago will be very dull without us,' said Stewart. 'He'll want to come to school too.'

'Debbie has promised to send us a hamper

once a week,' said Basil more cheerfully. 'I told her to be sure and put in some of her home-made cakes, and lots of that toffee we showed her how to make. That,' with a sigh, 'will be something to look forward to.'

'Why, good gracious!' cried Stewart hastily, 'here is your Ladye Nancye coming! She must have seen us.'

'So it is!' cried Basil, colouring with delight and surprise. 'Let's go and meet her!'

They were off their perch, and tearing over the ground like young hares in another instant.

'I saw you from my window,' said Nancette. 'I thought I should like to join you. You do not mind?'

'Mind? No!' cried Basil, delighted. 'We've been making a pilgrimage,' he added. 'We had to say good-bye to all our pets. Isn't it horrid leaving a place?'

'I promise to look after them all for you,' said the girl gently; 'and I will write every week and tell you about them.'

'Will you really? That's awfully good,'

said Basil. 'Of course I'll write to you,' he went on, after a moment's silence; 'not that I'm much good at letter-writing. In fact, I hate it, but I'll do my best. And now,' looking gravely at her, 'how do you think you'll get on with Mrs. Freere?'

'I like her very much,' said the girl candidly; 'she is quite different to what I expected. Why,' looking at him reproachfully —'why did you say she was old, and prim, and disagreeable?'

'In order to give you a pleasant surprise,' said the boy, laughing. 'I thought if I said she was nice, you would be sure to think she wasn't; but if you were told she was horrid, you'd be quite pleased to find her different.'

'Was she a great friend of your guardian's?' asked Nancette somewhat timidly.

The boys had taken an arm on either side, and they were all walking now through the dew-wet glades that were sweet and fresh as flowers and sunshine could make them.

'I think so,' said Basil; 'I don't quite know. I believe he knew her when she was

a girl. Then she got married and went out to America, as you know. We've only seen her now and then this last year. She lived in a queer, ramshackle old house, away down on the coast. Her father left it her. She used to ask us over for a day, and Mr. Glendenning would come up in the evening and fetch us back. It's about twelve miles off where the house is. Only herself and an old servant lived there. Why,' with a laugh, 'it will seem quite lively here after it. I thought you'd like her, and I thought you'd be friends.'

'I do not think I make friends easily,' said the girl sadly. 'But I hope—yes, I do hope she will be one. I feel so terribly alone.'

Stewart here dashed off to look at a squirrel's nest he had discovered. Basil still walked beside her, his arm linked in hers.

'Ladye Nancye,' he said gravely, 'if anyone can put things straight, she can; but take my advice, tell her everything, and, above all, don't you see that Frenchman again!'

* * * * *

They had made a tour of everything—the kitchen-garden, the paddock, the orchard, the wood, and the old shabby schoolroom.

The boxes were packed and in the hall; and breakfast had been partaken of in a depressed and nervous manner. Mrs. Freere had done her best to raise the spirits of the party, but Nancette's sad face, and Deborah's weeping one, and old Clitheroe's maundering forebodings, had counteracted her good intentions.

At last the waggonette came round, and with very white faces and a poor effort at composure, the boys gave their last kisses and handshakes.

'Don't forget to write to me,' whispered Nancette as she laid both hands on the shoulder of her young knight, and looked with brimming eyes at the bright handsome face, now so pale and tearful, despite the boy's resolute efforts to appear manly and heroic. 'And don't forget me,' she added below her breath.

'That I won't,' he said earnestly; and,

with one last handshake, he sprang into the waggonette, followed by the weeping Stewart.

Then the coachman drove off at a quick trot, and the two women stood sadly there in the entrance, watching for the last wave of Basil's handkerchief, and the last sight of the two young figures that seemed to take with them all the brightness and mirth of the desolate old house.

'Now,' said Myra Freere, turning to the girl beside her, 'now we have to "make company" for each other, as the children say. To begin with, let us be as much as possible in the open air. The year is at its best, and earth and heaven are kinder than humanity. With air and sunshine, and flowers and freedom, and youth and health to enjoy them, life cannot be such a heavy burden, after all. Unhappiness doesn't last for ever.'

'I will do whatever you wish,' said Nancette gently; 'but my unhappiness is too deeply rooted for Nature to ease.'

'When we know the disease a great point is gained,' said Mrs. Freere. 'You are the

patient; I am going to try and find a remedy. You will take it when I do?'

The girl looked at her thoughtfully. The shadow of a smile seemed to touch her pale lips.

'Yes,' she said, 'when you do.'

BOOK III.

PENANCE.

CHAPTER I.

FRAGMENTS FROM A JOURNAL KEPT BY MYRA FREERE DURING HER STAY AT OWL'S ROOST.

I CAME here to-night with strange and conflicting feelings. I had a hard struggle with myself before I could give in to Errol Glendenning's wish. How strange it seemed that he should ask me to be a friend to his wife! *His* wife!

The memory of many bitter years lay heavy at my heart. They had changed me, I think, more than I fully recognised; but when I thought of the lonely girl in that lonely house, and saw the pained and altered

face of my old friend, I seemed also to see a duty before me, and I bent my unwilling spirit to its acceptance.

Some painful mystery is at work here. Something, cruel as sin, yet intangible as a shadow, has parted Errol Glendenning from his wife. It must be my task to learn it—to help them—to leave them happy and content ere I go back to my own life of loneliness once more.

She is very young, and very, very lovely. As she came to meet me in her simple white dress, and with the red sunset light on her beautiful hair, I felt almost afraid of her loveliness. It was like nothing earthly. But she is too serious and too sad. I wish she were the girl that her years should make her. I wish there was something bright and fanciful about her. But she carries a heavy burden, that is plain, and she needs sympathy, and love, and help.

I won a confession from her to-night. Passionately as Errol Glendenning loves her

(I read that in his face and voice when he spoke of her), she does not care for him. His absence seems a relief; her heart is absorbed by another feeling. There is just the chance that it may be an unworthy one —the chance that a girl's fancy has been caught by a temporary infatuation — the chance that time may heal the wound, and give her peace, and strength, and comfort. But if it is not so—if something has gone out of her life as—as once it went out of mine—how hard it will be, how terribly, bitterly hard!

How funny boys are! Basil giving her over to my charge and care in a solemn, protective fashion would have been comic but for his earnestness. He is quite devoted to her, and she to him. I am sorry the boys have gone. They gave some element of brightness to this dull and gloomy place. For though Owl's Roost has a beauty and grandeur of its own, there is no doubt that gloom predominates. Everything in the

house itself is old, and dark, and faded. The dingy tapestries, the faded velvets and satins of the curtains, the funereal beds, the dim old portraits—all have a gloomy and depressing effect upon a stranger.

Eight years ago I knew them all so well. Eight years—it is a large slice out of a woman's life!

And now I am here, living under his roof, and expected to be the friend of his wife. She needs a friend if ever a woman did. Her confession to-day told me that.

So there is 'another.' She only said *was*, but I will not put it in the past tense yet. It must have been something connected with that discovery that has sent Errol Glendenning into voluntary exile. That is so like a man! Why did he not stay here and win her heart for himself, and oust his rival out of her fancy? She is too young for a first romance to be more to her than fancy. He has wedded her hurriedly and inconsiderately, discovered the fancy for 'another,' then left her here

alone in her youth, and ignorance, and sorrow.

I thought Errol Glendenning would have been more chivalrous and less harsh of judgment. Men have a tendency to repress emotion, or, rather, a display of emotion, as if it were a breach of good manners to possess feeling. When I saw Errol Glendenning last, he was full of repression. I drew my own conclusions, therefore, and imagined that his feelings must be very deep and his sufferings also. This seems a cold-blooded way of writing it down. I wonder sometimes if I am getting cold-blooded. I hope not—oh, I hope not! but a long, long heartache must tell upon one in time. Mine has been with me for very long. And now——

I broke off here last night. I don't want to drift into introspect or self-analysis. It is a dangerous habit. You dissect yourself morally; you classify your sensations, and peer into your feelings, and are always

examining and adjusting your inner mechanism.

I have been wandering about the woods with Nancette. She is depressed after parting with the boys. Errol Glendenning might have let them remain here a year longer. It would not have harmed them, and I do not think it wise to separate his wife from all that is bright and young. But I suppose men will never understand women.

The more I see her, the more I wonder what the mystery can be. She is too young, and certainly too innocent, to have committed a very serious fault.

I asked old Deborah to-day what had happened to change her master so terribly, but she knows little more than I do. There was a lover, she says, and he came down here on their wedding-night, and was very indignant, and very wrathful; but, although Errol Glendenning forbade him the house, he did not seem to blame his wife for this episode—not at the time.

Yet still he separated himself from her,

and, according to Deborah, has not seen her since. Now, from what I know of Errol, he is too gentle and chivalrous to act in such a manner without strong provocation; but here my researches end, unless Nancette herself chooses to enlighten me.

Two more days have passed. I think she begins to trust me, and, I hope, like me.

Last night as I sat by the fire in my room, which adjoins her own, a knock came at the door, and I heard her voice asking if she might come in.

'I know I shall not be able to sleep to-night,' she said; 'may I sit with you a little while?'

Her face was as white as her dressing-gown; her lovely rich hair was unbound, and hung in one long loose plait almost to her feet. She looked like some visitor from another world with those pure, colourless tints, and starry eyes.

I am, and always have been, a great

beauty-lover. I never tire of watching Nancette's face. I placed her in a low, deep chair opposite my own, and stirred the fire into a blaze.

'This is very nice,' I said. 'We will sit here and talk till you feel sleepy.'

'That will be a very unusual circumstance,' she said, with that faint smile that only seems to touch her lips and leave them.

'It ought not to be,' I told her gravely; 'you are too young to be troubled with sleepless nights and wakeful hours.'

'I shall have to try sleeping-draughts,' she said, linking her small, pretty fingers one in the other, and letting them rest idly on her lap. 'I sometimes think I should like to go to sleep and not wake for years, and years, and years! I wonder what would have happened by then.'

'Do you want anything to happen?' I asked her curiously.

For a moment her eyes flashed, then the white lids hid them.

'Yes,' she said, 'one thing.'

'I hope,' I said, 'it is the one thing that would make your life complete.'

She looked at me gravely.

'It is not what you think,' she said, 'nor anything that you could guess. But,' with a sudden change of tone, 'it does not matter —it never could happen. Things don't easily come right in this world.'

'Perhaps,' I said, 'that is only because they don't come in our own way. That is one of our mistakes.'

'Life is full of them, is it not?' she said wearily. 'You told me so once.'

'I am afraid it is,' I answered. 'Human nature is very foolish and very impracticable.'

'I think some people must be born to be unfortunate,' she said. 'I am one. Whatever I have done turned out wrong; whatever I wish to do seems impossible. I often think it must be a strange sensation to be happy.'

'Do you mean to say,' I asked, startled by her words and her voice, 'that you have never been happy?'

'Never!' she said, looking at me with her large and serious eyes. 'I cannot remember the feeling. I thought once I had experienced it, but it was only a fearfulness and uncertainty — a looking forward to some shadowy prospect that faded away before I had actually seen it.'

'It is all to come,' I said gently. 'No one is destined to be always unhappy.'

She leant back in her chair; her hands were trembling.

'I should be afraid to be anything else,' she said. 'I could not understand it. But do not let us get morbid. I did not want to speak about myself.' She hesitated a moment, clasping and unclasping her restless fingers. 'I want you,' she said, 'to tell me about my —I mean about Mr. Glendenning when you knew him long ago. I know so little of him. I scarcely seemed to know him at all before—before I married, and since—well, since then everything has gone wrong between us.'

'He ought to have told you about himself;' I said, wondering how two words in that

speech could have sent so sharp a thrill of pain through my heart. 'Long ago!' Well, it seemed long enough ago now.

I summed up courage. I told her of the lonely boy whose fate had been so sad, of the accident that had made his boyhood only a penance, and his manhood a thing of dread and pain, and set him apart from his fellow-men, even more than his own proud sensitiveness. He was not in any way brilliant. His cleverness was not superficial, but deep, studious, and thorough, as indeed was his whole nature. He was not addicted to friendships, or sociality, yet no one could call him a misanthrope. As for women, it had always seemed to me that he only looked on them as abstract phenomena of nature—creatures with whom he could have no possible concern. I told her all this, but I did not tell her how that calm indifference had been used to irritate me in my passionate and restless youth; how once I would have given worlds for power to awake the inner fire that slumbered in that grand and lonely soul. I think he himself

hardly knew it was there, but I knew it, and I wondered for whom it would one day burst into flame. His was a nature to waken slowly. It was always distrustful of its own power over others, and its own charms and strength. Being unused to love and tenderness, it had, in a way, assured itself of independence. It said: 'I shall be always alone. I must learn to be self-sufficient.' Up to a certain day and hour this had been possible. I saw the wonder and the fear in Nancette's eyes as I told her that she at last had broken the spell, and opened the floodgates of that passionate tenderness. Her voice broke across my words with a little low cry of terror.

'I hope,' she said—'oh, I hope you are mistaken! Surely he does not love me like that!'

'You must judge for yourself,' I said. 'I have only told you what I know. The Errol Glendenning who came to me some two weeks back was not the Errol Glendenning of other days. His life had been uprooted

from all its calm content. He was a dreamer no longer, but a man, strong to love, to suffer, to endure.'

She shivered as she sat there in the warm blaze of the fire.

'He does not care for me as much as you fancy,' she said slowly. 'How could he? He knows so little of me.'

'When a man loves,' I said, 'he thinks he knows enough. And he told me that he loved you; but, of course, you know that.'

'I am afraid I did not think of it much,' she said slowly; 'but I always thought he was very good and steadfast.'

'That is just the word to express him,' I said. 'He is very steadfast. It will not make life any easier for him. I am always sorry for people whose memories are faithful.'

'I wish,' she said, almost passionately, 'there were no such thing.'

'As steadfastness?' I asked.

'No—as memory.'

'But it would be sad to have no remem-

brance at all,' I answered. 'One must take the bitter with the sweet.'

'Should you think,' she asked suddenly, 'that I was a wicked woman—too wicked and hardened for a man to forgive her?'

I started.

'No!' I cried with vehemence. 'Who said you were?'

'I myself,' she answered sadly; 'and Mr. Glendenning thinks so also. Does not his conduct prove it?'

'He is hurt and angry now,' I said; 'but he will relent, and forgive you. It is his duty, and duty is easy where love is its counsellor.'

'*Love!*' She shuddered, and her hands trembled more visibly than they had done before. 'Oh no—no! That is all killed and dead for ever. We shall be strangers all our lives long—all our lives long!'

CHAPTER II.

For a week Nancette has been very ill. I suppose the long strain of secret unhappiness has told upon her at last. She seemed to break down completely. She could not eat or sleep, or do anything save lie in a darkened room, with closed eyes and fevered limbs, shuddering at every noise, and—so it seemed to me—haunted by some fear she could not, or would not express.

The first thing that roused her, and seemed to bring her back to life again, was a letter from Basil. He had written once to tell us of their arrival. but the second letter was so characteristic that I feel tempted to copy it here. It began as follows :

'Dear Lady Nancye,

'I write to tell you how I like school,

which is not at all, and I'm afraid I shan't. The first thing the boys did was to fight me all round. I licked three of them the first day. I did not mind that. They took my best hat and made a targit of it. (P.S.—I don't quite know how to spell that, as I've not written it before. I'm better at writing Latin and Greek than English. That's how old Chasable taught us.) They also took my watch, and opened it to see how the wheels worked. Some of the wheels have got lost, and the others don't fit. I'm afraid the watch will not be of much use this term. It doesn't go now. There are fifty boys here. Last night they all went out, except me and Stewart, into the covered courtyard, which is the playground in wet weather. It was not wet, and they ought to have been in bed; but they wanted to play at being Zulus. They had scarcely any clothes on, and had some old saucepans and fire-irons to make a noise with while they danced their war-dance. The masters heard them, and locked them out. When they tried to get in they could

not. I think they got frightened then. They were locked out in the cold stone yard for a long time. The masters said if the ringleaders would confess they would let them in ; so they promised. But, the moment the door was open, they rushed in like mad, and knocked down the masters, and up to the dormitories, and got into bed. It was a great lark. Next morning the whole school was caned. Also Stewart and me. That was not a lark. We said we had not been out of bed. One boy said I was a sneak to say so. I fought him. He says he will not call me a sneak again.

'I am in the third form. I mean third from the first. Stewart is in the sixth. Stewart says he does not like the food. It is not wholesome. The meat is raw and stringy, the tea is only hot water, and the butter is ransid. (P.S.—That is another word I have not written before, so please excuse mistakes.)

'They have bolster-matches in the dormitories. We are going to have one in our's

to-night. Some of the boys tie knots in the towels, and flip our bare legs with them. It hurts. I dare say I shall not mind school when I get used to it. I play cricket in the second eleven. I wish it was midsummer.

'Dear Lady Nancye, I hope you are well, and the rabbits, and the dogs, and my pigeons, and Bob, the pony. Have you tried to ride him yet? I miss you very much. I often think of you. I am glad Mrs. Freere came to stay with you. Please write me a long letter, as long as this. I think I have told you everything. Tell Debbie to send some more cakes and toffee. It does not last long when you have to share it with fifty boys. The boys are always very kind to us when we get a box. Stewart sends his love. Good-bye.

'From your affectionate friend,

'BASIL.'

We laughed so much over this production, that it quite roused Nancette from her languor and depression. She answered it the same day

It was not a cheerful day. The rain had been falling steadily and persistently. The outlook from Nancette's room, where she lay on a couch by the window, was very dreary.

'Do you never have any visitors?' I asked her suddenly.

'No, of course not; no one knows I am married.'

'But you might let it be known. Wouldn't you like some society? It seems to me that this seclusion is telling upon your health as well as upon your spirits.'

She shook her head.

'Mr. Glendenning did not wish anyone to know of our marriage, and I don't think the people about here would interest me at all.' Then she looked at me with her wonderful deep eyes. 'I don't want any other society than yours,' she said softly; 'you have done me so much good.'

'I wish,' I said, 'you would get well and strong, and come down to the sea. That would do you good.'

'The sea!' she shivered and turned very white. 'Oh, I cannot bear to go there. I feel as if I could never look at it again.'

'Why?' I asked, astonished.

Her eyes drooped; a strange repressed look came over her face.

'I am ashamed to tell you,' she said in a low, unsteady voice; 'and yet, if you are ever to understand me, I might as well tell you the truth. It was by the sea that I last met the man whom I had the misfortune to love. It was by the sea that the first real, terrible subtlety of the word "temptation" became a tangible and vivid thing. It was by the sea that my life was wrecked, and my heart broken. Its sound will always be a terror to me now.'

'I am glad,' I said gravely, 'that you say "the man you *had* the misfortune to love." It is a thing of the past, is it not?'

'The love,' she said; 'but not the pain—not the pain!'

'Would it hurt you,' I asked, 'to tell me of him? Some sorrows grow easier when

shared, and I think you know my sympathy is all your own.'

'Everyone was against him,' she said piteously. 'His whole career has been unfortunate. I think I pitied him so much at first because of—of that! And he was so handsome! I have never seen such a face. It is always haunting me. And when he said he loved me I was so proud—oh, so proud. It seemed as if the world did not hold his equal.'

'You were free then?' I asked.

'Yes. I was at school. He is my only living relative. He came to see me there. My father was away at the time, but I wrote and told him. He seemed angry. He said I must not encourage these visits. Then I knew I loved him. It was such a shock to even think of not seeing him and meeting him any more.'

'And then?' I asked, as she paused.

'My father saw him, and made him promise to give me up. He told me that. We were parted—I thought for ever. I was in de-

spair. Then I met Mr. Glendenning. My father said he loved me and wished to marry me. I told him I could not accept him, but he did not speak to me himself. Then came the accident and my father's death.'

'I know of that,' I said, in a low voice; 'and you were friendless, and alone, and poor.'

'I thought I was poor,' she said; 'but I know now that I was not. I had been deceived. My father had simply confided his fortune to the care of Mr. Glendenning. If —if Pierre de Volens had known of that, he could have married me.'

'Could!' I interposed in amazement. 'Was it for sake of money, then, that he forsook you?'

'That is what they say,' she answered; 'but they judge so harshly. You—can you not be more lenient? Pierre de Volens could not marry a fortuneless girl. It would have been his ruin.'

'If he had loved you,' I said resolutely, 'he would not have yielded you up so easily.

Love does not reason as to suitability or convenience. It acts on its own impulses of tenderness.'

'Still,' she said, 'I think he loved me. Fate was very hard on him.'

'You are obliged to make excuses for him,' I said. 'That shows that he needs them. A great love will conquer Fate, or die in the attempt. Ah, my dear, all men are selfish, more or less. Perhaps your imagination has led you astray. You see this man only as you wish to see him—not as he really is!'

'Everyone is against him,' she said mournfully, 'even you.'

'Is that why you make him a hero?' I asked. 'I do not wish to judge him harshly. Let me hear some more about him. You have seen him since you married. Did he speak of—of the past?'

'Yes,' she answered, growing very white. 'I have seen him three times since I was Errol Glendenning's wife. The first time was on my wedding-night, when he came down here. It was terrible—that scene. The

second was on the cliffs—by accident. The third was by the sea, when—when Basil saved me!'

'Basil saved you!' I echoed. 'How?'

'I think I was beside myself with unhappiness,' she said mournfully. 'I seemed to have probed life's deepest bitterness. My husband had forsaken me—I was quite alone. And he—he was by my side once more; and with his presence my pulses throbbed to living joy, and all my dreams came back. I could only think of how I loved him, and how he—loved me.'

She bent her face on her hands. Her voice was broken by tears.

My arm stole round her—the poor unhappy child who had been so sorely tempted.

'And he took advantage of that hour of weakness and loneliness to tempt you into a sin that all your life's regret would never wash away?' I said bitterly. 'That is like a man!'

'I was only too ready to listen,' she said. 'Do not blame him. His boat was there,

waiting to bear me to freedom and to bliss. I looked at him, and thought of the sweetness of "to-day," and the bitterness of the to-morrows, when I should have sent him from me. I listened to his pleadings. I thought in all the wide world there was no other to love me as he would love; and then—Basil came.'

'Thank heaven,' I said, below my breath.

Her hands fell; a faint red flush stained her cheeks.

'I was ashamed,' she said. 'The boy's frank voice and clear eyes struck home to me like a spoken truth. I knew right from wrong. I knew if I chose the wrong, there would be no palliation. I—I sent him from me. Then something seemed to fall from my eyes. I looked at the blue sky and the blue water, and his face seemed to fade into them, and a great cold weight fell on my heart. I have never been the same since that day—I do not think I ever shall. That cold, strange deadness is always on my heart. If I saw him now I do not think I should care.

I seem to have lost the power of feeling anything but unhappiness.'

'That power will come back,' I said, 'when something worthier recalls it.'

She sadly shook her head.

'I do not think I wish for it,' she said. 'It is a thing one cannot live over twice. I have learned enough.'

'My dear,' I said gently, 'you must listen to me. I am an old woman in comparison with yourself, and I, too, have had an—experience. It is different to your own, but it was quite as hard to bear. The world is full of women who suffer as we suffer, but we think no pain is like our own pain. What you have told me of Pierre de Volens convinces me that he was in no way worthy of your love. A pure, steadfast, chivalrous love never seeks only its own selfish ends. He sought only that. I think if you had made a friend of Mr. Glendenning—if you had told him the whole truth—he would not have been so hard on you; but it is a terrible fate for a man to give his whole heart and trust,

and find no return. A man like Errol Glendenning could not be content with bare duty and respect. He must have loved intensely. I cannot think you were right in deceiving him.'

'I did not deceive him,' she said. 'He knew about Pierre. My father told him.'

'Knew about it,' I said, 'and married you!'

'Yes.'

'I can't understand it,' I said. 'From what he told me, I supposed he only discovered the truth too late—the very day you were married; that the shock and grief drove him from you in utter desperation. Was there—are you sure there was nothing else?'

She turned deathly white.

'There was—something,' she said; 'but he could not have found it out that night—at least——'

She hesitated and broke off abruptly.

'Ah,' she said, 'I remember now; I fainted, and when I recovered my dress was unfastened, and the paper was gone.'

'The paper!' I said. 'What paper?'

'He must have found it,' she went on hurriedly. 'My father said I must never tell a living soul, or—or no man or woman would respect me again. It was my—my secret, that I must always keep.'

'Your father knew it, then?' I asked.

'Yes,' she said. 'My poor father!'

'Was it,' I said sternly, 'a secret that gave Errol Glendenning the right to act as he has done? Tell me that.'

She bent her head. Again that faint, shamed flush coloured the clear pallor of her beautiful skin.

'It nearly broke my father's heart,' she said.

'And for sake of it,' I said bitterly, 'you have broken your husband's, and sent him out into the world a bitter and despairing man.'

She looked up at me with her white face and great, sad haunting eyes.

'I told you,' she said, 'I was very wicked. You had better believe it, and leave me like—

like the others. I seem to bring misfortune wherever I go.'

Then a revulsion of feeling shook me to my heart's depths.

'I shall not leave you,' I said; 'I mean to help you to put your life straight again. This fancy—this wild passion of yours will die out. It is an unworthy one. You will suffer for it; but the suffering will not be for long—I am sure of it. This man has done his best to wreck your life at its very outset. He must not glory in his success. He is a selfish coward—of that I am sure—and you thought him a hero. Dear, we are two women who have suffered and sinned. That should make us pitiful to each other. Let me help you to win back happiness. Only tell me one thing: if—if your secret were known to your husband, would it part you irrevocably?'

Her clear, lovely eyes looked straight into mine.

'I never thought so,' she said; 'but he said it.'

I was silent; a thousand thoughts and emotions were busy in my brain.

'You think,' I said at last, 'that he discovered it accidentally on your marriage-night. Have you seen him since?'

'I saw him,' she said, 'on that day I told you of. He would not come to the house. I think nothing would induce him to sleep beneath the roof that I have dishonoured.'

'Not *that!*' I cried entreatingly. 'Oh, surely not that!'

'He said so,' she answered with a sort of despair. 'I could not think or reason clearly. I seemed to have reached a crisis in my life. Everything had happened that could happen on that one day. I felt like ice. His grief did not touch me, nor his generosity, for he has been very generous.'

'It is his nature,' I said stupidly.

I felt too bewildered myself now for clear reasoning.

'Yes,' she went on, 'very generous and—and thoughtful. He sent you. I sometimes

think I cannot be quite bad, or he would not have done that.'

'I think,' I said, 'you are mistaken. Your fault may have been one of thoughtlessness or ignorance, but not of guilt.'

'I was very ignorant,' she said, 'and I am not strong—I mean of nature. I think I am easily swayed by my feelings.'

'It is a dangerous nature,' I said.

'It is a poor and pitiful one,' she said in sudden, passionate condemnation. 'I deserve my punishment. I cannot blame him—I never have blamed him. I know he does not understand me. All my sorrow came upon me so early, and I had no mother, and no friend, and no one to counsel me; and my father—I know he loved me, and was proud of me, but he seemed to think I had no right to feel or remember, and I could not help doing both.'

'You would not have been a woman had you not,' I said in that sudden, broken pause that was an effort against the weakness of tears.

'But,' she went on, 'men do not think of that, and they are unmerciful to weakness. Oh, I have been weak—horribly weak. I see it all now, when it is too late.'

'It is not too late,' I said slowly; 'and Errol Glendenning is the last man in the world to be unmerciful to a woman's weakness.'

'You are a staunch champion,' she said, looking suddenly at me. 'You—you ought to hate me for spoiling his life.'

'You have not spoilt it irretrievably,' I answered calmly. 'That is why I hope. If you can only convince yourself of the unworthiness of that other, you are on the way to recovery. Love is only an illness like—like any physical disease. It has its remedies and alleviations.'

'It is a foolish thing,' she said passionately; 'an irrational thing. I wish to heaven I had never — never experienced it!'

Then she lay back on her pillows, and cried bitterly and long.

CHAPTER III.

FIRST LETTER FROM MYRA FREERE TO ERROL GLENDENNING.

'OWL'S ROOST,
'*April*, 187—.

'MY DEAR FRIEND,

'I came here to please you, but I fancy I am staying to please myself. I feel most deeply for you and for your wife; but I cannot help thinking that you might make matters better if you would. I think men are somewhat inconsistent, and I know perfectly well that they can always find good reasons for following their own inclinations. If your inclinations led you from your home and your duty, I can only suppose your reasons are sound. To me it seems as if they were irrational.

'The more I see of life, and men, and women, the more convinced I am that most of them make fatal mistakes in marriage. It may be the fault of sentiment, of weakness, of accident, blindness, folly, obstinacy—but all the same it is a fault. Perhaps a marriage of sentiment is the most disappointing of all—for women are not angels, and men are not demi-gods. When they discover this fact individually, they become tragic; they don't reason, they don't look at facts by the light of logic and experience—they usually rush into the opposite extreme, and declare each other to be—well, what you please to suggest.

'I am a practical person, as you know. I think I never had much sentiment in me. You used to say so in your poetic youth, when I ventured to disagree with various high-flown and imaginative sonnets addressed to mythical beings, the like of whom certainly never graced this sphere of ours. Being a practical person, I don't like to see other persons who are not practical, voluntarily

condemning themselves to lifelong misery on account of a fancied wrong.

'You will, of course, say your wrong is not fanciful—that it has struck at the roots of your life; and I am inclined to think you really believe it when you say it. But, from what I can gather, there is every hope that this wrong may be righted, and that a day may yet come when you may regather happiness and peace from that tree of life you now regard as seared and dead! To go from poetry to plain facts, you have seriously misjudged your wife. You married her in ignorance of her real feelings, and at a time when grief had numbed and paralyzed her energies. She is a young, beautiful, passionate, romantic creature—as easy to guide as a child. Her first romance has been a wretched and most prosaic one. The springs of her life seem broken. She is morbidly sensitive, and accuses herself of sins of whose very meaning she is totally ignorant.

'She wants help, sympathy, encouragement, a strong nature on which to lean, and

a gentle heart in whose tenderness to trust. Who should give her these but you, her husband—and you forsake her! I think you are wrong—seriously wrong. She did not love you—and worse, she loved some one else; that is what you plead as excuse. It is no excuse, since you married her with your eyes open—since you were in her father's confidence, and knew the fatal fascination this man had for her.

'You leave her now completely at his mercy, and give him the power to use the strongest possible argument in his favour—the argument that she is an unloved and forsaken wife. My friend, you are doing her a great wrong, and yourself also. It is not like you—in fact, it is so utterly unlike you that I fail to recognise in this cruel and unchivalrous action anything connecting it with my previous knowledge of Errol Glendenning.

'I am speaking plainly, because I feel deeply. A woman can read a woman as no man can. Your wife may have been weak

and foolish, but she is not a wicked woman, and she does not deserve to be treated as if she were. In her ignorance and inexperience she has fallen a victim to an infatuation for an unprincipled and fascinating man—a man apparently only too well skilled in the art of deluding women. But I am certain that this feeling has not taken deep root in her heart. Her nature is still undeveloped; it has charms, and gifts, and capabilities of which you are ignorant, and which you alone might call forth and enjoy, if it pleased you to take the trouble.

'I have written frankly and fully on this subject because I am deeply interested in it, and because it seems to me you are wilfully wrecking your life's happiness at its most critical moment. Trust a woman's judgment, and a woman who has your welfare most deeply and sincerely at heart. Come back to your own home and win your wife to yourself, while you can yet do so.

'To set up this barrier of years and absence between you is absurd. You cannot

give her back her freedom without a stigma on her name and your own. Would you drag your wrongs, as you call them, before a public court, and call the world's notice to your own folly! I thought you were old-fashioned enough to look upon marriage as a bond, to accept and reverence its obligations, and not seek to nullify them at the first shock of trouble. I might ask you if you should not have inquired a little more closely into you wife's past before she became your wife. You acted hastily, if trustfully, and now you make that haste and trust an excuse to forsake her, young, friendless, helpless, as you know her to be. The world will always condemn a woman—rarely a man. You do not even allow her to use your name. Everyone here is in ignorance of her position.

'My friend, this is all very wrong. She is in a false position; yet she is the mistress of your house, and has a right to your name and acknowledgment. She does not heed this, or notice it, but I do, and so will others. She says this is to go on for three years. It

is preposterous! You must have been mad to suggest or agree to such a thing. You must do something, unless you wish to throw her straight into the arms of the man who is your natural enemy, and hers—if she only knew it. What is there to hold her back if he summons her to his side? Bare duty and self-respect. We all know how weak they can become in the fire of a hopeless and despairing passion. Duty, honour, right—all demand that you should protect her—that she should preside here as mistress, and be acknowledged and recognised as such.

'Oh, foolish man! do you not see that the tie that binds her to you, your interests and responsibilities, weakens the hold of the past, and strengthens your claim on her heart? Surely—surely I have said enough? Enough to bring you back from Timbuctoo, or Ashantee, or any of those wild regions whither you may have fled for consolation. Believe me, you will only find it here, in your own home.

'Your ever faithful friend,

'Myra Freere.'

I wrote this letter after that last conversation with Nancette. I wrote it hurriedly, passionately, earnestly, brimful of eager excitement, and suppressing with a strong hand that innate selfishness that prompted me to use weaker arguments.

I wrote it and closed it, and then—then I leant my head upon the table and cried as if my heart would break.

It was very feminine to do that, and I might have made a dozen excuses for doing it, but I knew the real one well enough. I knew it years ago. I thought it had ended, but it seems there are things that have no end—for a woman.

It was a sentiment then; it is only a miserable, undignified thing now. But it is wonderful what a hold some feelings have over one. I said to myself once, 'A year or two will do it,' but I was wrong. Yes, I was quite wrong. And yet how glibly I can reason with that pretty, heart-broken girl! How wise I seem, even to myself! But I

am not wise at all. Only a foolish, suffering, wounded woman, who will carry with her to her grave a secret that no other living soul knows, or suspects.

CHAPTER IV.

LETTER FROM ERROL GLENDENNING TO MYRA FREERE.

'GENOA,
May 1*st*, 187—.

'MY DEAR MYRA,

'Your letter came safely to hand. I can only thank you for it, and your good intentions in writing it. You will say I am very obstinate when I tell you that your arguments, clever and convincing as they are, have in no way altered my decision. I *cannot* come back to Owl's Roost. You know certain facts, and you reason by the light they give you. But you don't know all. I have been duped and deceived in a different manner to what you imagine. Heaven knows I would not be hard on a young girl's ignorance and

weakness; but there is a secret in Nancette's life, and, had I known it, I would never have made her my wife. She may tell you of her love for this villain and of his fatal power over her, but she will not tell you more. Do you think I am unacquainted with the witchery of her angel face, and voice like music, and her solemn mysterious glances, that seem to say what a beautiful soul lies in those starry depths? No—to my everlasting sorrow, no. They haunt me still, and will haunt me till my miserable life shall end. I was deceived by her father for his own purposes. He confessed as much in the letter I found after his death, in which he entrusts Nancette and her fortune to me. He bade me not read the letter unless she became my wife—a wise proviso. I am rightly punished, as you say, for my rashness and my trust; but both were the outcome of an intense and chivalrous devotion to the beautiful, friendless girl whom Fate had left to my care.

'More I cannot tell you. I thank you for well-meaning efforts, but they are useless.

The barrier between my wife and myself is one that nothing can break down, save a miracle, and we are beyond the age of miracles. Still, I would do her every justice, as you suggest. She may use my name; she may, if she chooses, visit, or go among such neighbours as enliven our county. I withdraw my objections so far. But she must put up with the remarks and questions my absence will draw down upon her, and make what excuse she likes. Fortunately, I have always been counted an eccentric man.

'I am leaving here for Terzia next week. You may address me there, if you care to write again. But please spare me the pain of useless arguments, and believe that, however mistaken my conduct looks in your eyes, it is more than justified in my own.

'Yours ever faithfully,

'Errol Glendenning.'

Obstinate! Yes, I should think he is obstinate. This letter was quite a shock to

me. I had so hoped and looked forward to better things. Of course I had said nothing to Nancette about my writing, and she is evidently not well acquainted with her husband's caligraphy, for she made no remark when she saw his letter to me.

She is certainly better. I will not suffer her to get morbid. Neither do I ridicule or resent the fact of that cherished romance. That is not the way to cure it. Rather would I lead her on to speak of it, showing by small facts and details that her own imagination has coloured the incidents of her unhappy love—that she has seen this man by its light instead of in his own. How he would hate me if he heard me speak of him as I do!—not that his hate or regard would trouble me for a moment.

I wonder often where he is now. Nancette has not seen him or heard from him, since the day she escaped his subtly-laid snare. How I bless Basil every time I think of that day! Providence must surely have sent him to the spot just in the very nick of time.

By the way, here is another letter of his, nearly as funny as the first, so I have copied it in my journal :

'Dear Lady Nancye,

'Thanks, awfully, for your letter. It was very nice. We like school better ; still, we are counting the days to the holidays. They cook blackbeetles in the soup. I don't think it can be wholesome—nor does it look nice. Debbie would have fits if she saw our dinners. One day there is boiled pork and fly-pudding. The boys call it fly-pudding, because the currints — is that right?—are scattered about so few, that you see about one in every square foot of pudding. You wouldn't like to eat it, I know. Stewart used to get awful sick at first, but he's better now. The boys don't want to fight us as much as they did. I have grown two inches; my trousers have got too short. I had to buy a new hat with my pocket-money, because the boys made mine into a target, as I told you before. I have only threepence left. I wish

Mr. Glendenning would send me some more. One boy here owes me eighteenpence. He is not coming back to school, so I do not think I shall get it returned. He says he will send it; but he is not a nice boy, and he tells stories. Do not send me any money unless you can quite spare it. I don't know if Mr. Glendenning has given you more than he did us. I think it would be awful jolly if you and I, and Stewart, went off to the prairies together. What do you say? I'm sure I could take care of you, and go trapping and hunting, and all that. It's the proper sort of life, take my word for it! Give my love to Mrs. Freere. Do you ever see old Chasable? I wouldn't mind grinding with him again. There's a French master here—such a rum old chap; but I like him. The boys call him "Beetle." He is always talking of his discoveries in natural science. He is very clever, only no one will believe it. They make fun of me because I like him; I don't mind that. His name's Mr. St. Jean; I do not think it is his real name. Has your Frenchman turned up

again? But I hope he's not "your" Frenchman any longer. I remember our talk that Sunday. This old chap has given up his name, because his family might be hurt at the idea of his turning teacher! Rum thing, pride! Don't think I've got any. Stewart is writing also; but he always wants to know what I'm putting, and then copy it. I say, what's the good of two letters being both the same?

'Your loving

'BASIL.

'P.S.—The cakes and toffee have all gone. I suppose Debbie couldn't send us a round of beef? I was going to send you a piece off ours, that we had to-day. Talk of stringy—my word! But it might grease the letter, so I chucked it out of the window. It fell on the head of the head-master. He didn't like it, judging from his face. Good-bye again. Hurrah for Midsummer!

'P.SS.—P.SS.—So glad Mrs. Freere rides the little mare. You must really have a try

on Bob. He's as quiet as a lamb. He won't hurt you, I assure you.

'B. G.'

The days are running on. This morning I persuaded Nancette to go to church with me. It was the first time she had been since she came to Owl's Roost. I wonder what people will think when they hear who she is. For I mean to take Errol Glendenning at his word, and tell everyone she is his wife. The fact is certain, and what is the use of concealing it?

It was a warm, sunny day. She wore her usual white gown, and looked very lovely, though too fragile and delicate to please me.

We had to run the gauntlet of many critical eyes as we walked up the aisle to our seat. Nancette was not so conscious as myself.

One never feels how thoroughly respectably solid and devout English people are, till one has made the round of a series of country churches. The country-people are

modelled on the usual excellent pattern. So, I fear, is the rector, Basil's friend, Mr. Chasable. He belongs to the old school of preachers—prosy, dry, and safe. He chose the subject of Balaam's ass as a suitable sermon for a sleepy congregation on a hot summer day. After listening to him for a while, I became too confused to discover which was the offender, the ass or his master, but am thankful to say I was pulled out of this pit of difficulty by strong pulleys of symbolical and mystic explanations which resulted in convincing me that everything meant something else, and must be regarded as abstract to the main question of the ass and his powers of speech. The next moment, however, I was plunged into a doctrinal chaos, which, gratifying as it might have been to the preacher, was slightly mystifying to the congregation — at least, to such as were awake. The majority were not. I confess my ideas were not illuminated, nor did I perceive that such sermons were quite an unmixed blessing. In the end I fear my

view of the ass differed somewhat from that of the preacher.

A few people spoke to me when we came out, and I took the opportunity of introducing Nancette. The great lady of the neighbourhood, Lady Bosistow, whose husband is our M.P., was very gracious to the young mistress of Owl's Roost, though, of course, she asked more particularly for Mr. Glendenning. I said he was absent just now on business. As he was at no time a church-goer, and renowned throughout the neighbourhood for unsociability, no one seemed much surprised. We got into the carriage and drove home, I congratulating myself that the first ordeal was over.

'That was a strange sermon,' said Nancette, as we bowled along under the green shade of the trees, now fully clothed in bright and luxuriant verdure. 'What did it all mean?'

'I doubt if Mr. Chasable himself could explain that,' I said. 'I think he got entangled in a web of his own spinning.'

'One expects peace and promise from the Church,' she said; 'not mystification.'

'Ah,' I said, 'I wonder when the Church will learn that. It seems as if, in its own self-glorification, it could not believe in the worth of calm and repose. It is always exhorting, bullying, wailing, lamenting—cramming philosophies and creeds down people's throats—giving vent to arbitrary assertions, taking from us our primal right to comfort and content—and offering in their place disturbing theories and imperfect doctrines.'

'What sort of church would you attend if you had your choice?' she asked.

I smiled.

'Nature's—most of all,' I answered. 'But we are tied and bound by conventionality. I often look round on a congregation and wonder how many among them would like their real motives for attending church, revealed.'

'Perhaps,' she said, 'some of them have no motives. Nothing fits so easily as habit.'

'True,' I said; 'and if there is one habit

on which the British nation prides itself more than another, it is that of regular church attendance. It is the "regular" upon which it lays the greatest stress.'

'I used to think that at school,' she said. 'Oh, the weary, dreary, respectable Sundays —how dreadful they were! How I used to long for my bright sunny France then.'

'You are half a Frenchwoman at heart, I think,' I said, looking closely at her.

'Yes,' she answered with a faint sigh; 'by religion as well as birthright. I prefer our Church to yours. It has more life—more soul—more poetry and beauty. It seems to me that yours is stripped of everything that sweetens and beautifies the faith you worship and the church you attend. It may be prejudice—I don't know—but so it seems.'

'I dare say it does seem so,' I answered; 'English people always connect religion with gloom, and penance, and sacrifice, and general discomfort. It is a prejudice, I suppose; but they cling to it just as the Puritans of old did. To my mind there is something deeper

and holier in the teaching of Nature, would we but listen to it. But we think it too simple. Yet it would be sweet to lie in that tender bosom and listen to the comfort of that universal voice. To let slip the sense of our worldly cares and sorrows—our strifes, and narrow hopes, and vain strivings—to feel that the warfare of flesh and spirit was at an end, for a time at least; and that the hand of eternal goodness and wisdom rested on our world-weary brow.'

She looked at me with her beautiful sad eyes.

'That is better than a sermon,' she said. 'I have been wondering why you were so anxious for me to go to church. I should have been happier in the woods with you. I —I tried to pray, but thought seemed stagnant. Out here I feel my soul leap into one rush of sudden thoughts that spring to heaven; but there it was all dull, and heavy, and spiritless as death. Does that sound wicked?'

'It does not sound—conventional,' I said.

'Let us get out here and walk through the wood home. It will do us both good in our present mood.'

'Yes,' she answered, 'I think it will. Only——'

'Only what?' I asked gently as we moved on under the arch of trees that canopied the soft green turf.

'Only I am not in tune with Nature as you are. I sometimes think what would I not give for your changeless serenity.'

'The sky that has been swept by storm is always the brightest and fairest,' I answered gravely. 'I have not been always—serene.'

'I wish,' she said hesitatingly, 'you would tell me your story I know you have one. Is it—was it as painful as mine?'

'Quite as painful,' I said, 'to me. But I cannot tell you of it now. I want you to have a draught of peace, if not of Lethe.'

CHAPTER V.

'It can't be possible,' I said, 'that visitors are coming; yet I certainly hear chariot-wheels!'

We were sitting in the room designated by Deborah as 'my lady's boudoir' when I made this remark. 'My lady' herself rose and glanced in alarm through the curtained windows.

'Some one is certainly coming,' she said. 'That is the effect of church-going.'

'They have taken two days to decide whether you may be called upon,' I answered. 'Let us look upon it as a matter of course.'

She sat down nervously and in evident trepidation. Her face almost matched her gown in its colourless tints. Presently the

door opened. Old Clitheroe, with a new and important sense of the family dignity, announced 'Mrs. and Miss Tresyllian.'

I was tolerably well acquainted with the neighbouring 'squiresses,' but am happy to say I was not on intimate terms with any of them. I had been away so long that I seemed to come back to my old, ramshackle, desolate cottage as a new inhabitant, and certainly a very unsocial one.

Mrs. Tresyllian and her daughter were not favourites of mine. They swept into the room with portentous rustling skirts and nodding plumes, and gave a general effect of there not being sufficient space for them.

Nancette rose to greet them with a certain quiet dignity that pleased me. I shook hands also, and then we all sat down, and there was a faint, deadly pause.

'I—I really must apologize,' began Mrs. Tresyllian soothingly, 'for not calling before. But I had not the slightest idea—not the very slightest idea—that we had a Mrs.

Glendenning among us. You—you have only just arrived, I suppose?'

'I have been living here for nearly three months,' answered Nancette.

'Dear me! So long! And your good husband? I quite long to renew my acquaintance with him. He has been so very retired; we have really scarcely seen anything of him at all. But I suppose things will be altered now.'

'I don't fancy they will,' I put in at this juncture. 'Mr. Glendenning is not addicted to festivity in any shape or form. At present'—and I glanced at Nancette—'at present he is away from home on business. His absence, of course, prevents Mrs. Glendenning from entertaining. It is a matter of regret. Let us hope the regret may only be temporary—like the cause.'

She looked at me through her gold eyeglass.

'Are you staying here?' she asked somewhat insolently.

'I am,' I replied. 'You know it is not

good for man to be alone—still less for woman. I am taking care of Mrs. Glendenning during her husband's absence.'

'And you have been here nearly three months,' pursued the estimable dame. 'Dear me—three months! And to think I should not have known it! Has—has Lady Bosistow called on you yet?'

'We are expecting her to-day,' I said mendaciously. 'She has only lately returned from London.'

'Yes—yes; I know,' she said a little uncomfortably, for she and the 'great lady' were not on visiting terms, and a deep-seated animosity existed between them. 'I hope,' she added presently, 'Mr. Glendenning's business will soon be arranged. We shall be so delighted to welcome him among us again. You really must,' she added with ponderous playfulness, turning to Nancette—'you really must insist on his becoming social and—and—ah—convivial. He was quite a hermit, I assure you—quite a hermit.'

'It requires certain inducements to become

convivial, does it not?' I asked, offering the suggestion in an innocent and speculative fashion for her due consideration.

'There are many reasons, and—ah—inducements here,' she said, still contemplating her hostess, and only presenting me with a sight of a rubicund profile and a set of nodding yellow plumes. 'I am sure Mrs. Glendenning will acknowledge that when she knows us better.'

Nancette murmured something; I can't exactly say what. She looked very bored. The stony daughter sat frigidly in her chair, taking no part in the conversation. Presently the mother turned to me again.

'And how did you like America?' she asked, with a flattering appearance of interest.

'America!'

I looked at her in placid bewilderment. I was to all appearance strenuously endeavouring to collect my thoughts, and turn them into the channel she directed.

'Yes,' she said somewhat nervously; 'it was America you went to—wasn't it?'

'Ah, of course it was,' I answered with pleased alacrity; 'only I have been back so long that I really scarcely remember how I liked it.'

Her complexion assumed resplendent tints of dusky purple.

'I—I really was not aware—time passes so rapidly—so very many calls upon my time,' she stammered.

'I—I hope you are not apologizing for an inadvertent forgetfulness,' I said. 'I never have regarded myself as a person calculated to exact attention from my neighbours. Socially, I have not the position to be a success. Individually, I have not the inclination.'

'That is a pity,' said Miss Tresyllian, in a sudden, sharp, metallic fashion that startled us. It was so unexpected.

I regarded her with polite attention.

'I venture to disagree with you,' I said. 'I don't compassionate myself. I certainly have not the vanity to compassionate society.'

'Is it true,' asked the mother abruptly, 'that American women are all vulgar, and

say "I guess" and "I calkerlate" every sentence? And do they all eat with their knives?'

'There are vulgar American women,' I said, 'just as there are vulgar Englishwomen. Their tastes are as loud and overstrained in some things, as ours are in others.'

She turned up her lofty nose with a lofty scorn that was meant to be impressive. If she had hissed out 'Hateful woman!' it could not have been more audible to me than the mute expression of her face and gesture.

'When people go abroad,' she said rebukingly, 'they seem to acquire a reprehensible habit of ridiculing everything in their native land. I am thankful to say I have never travelled.'

'It is a good thing for widening one's powers of observation all the same,' I said. 'No doubt'—reflectively—'it my have its disadvantages.'

'I think if English people travelled more they would not be so narrow-minded,' interposed Nancette coolly.

That was the last straw. The metallic daughter gave utterance to a peculiar 'click' like the shutting of a lock, and the portly mother, bristling with outraged British dignity, rose from her seat, and hinted at departure. We were politely regretful that they should so soon deprive us of the pleasure of their society, but we were only regretful, not pressing as to its continuance. I think that became clear to them by the time they reached home.

As their carriage drove down the avenue, it met Lady Bosistow's driving up.

'My arrow, shot at a venture, has hit its mark,' I said, laughing, as I turned to Nancette. 'The country is really going to take you under its protection.'

Lady Bosistow was followed by Dr. and Miss Jago—an old bachelor and his maiden sister, round, rosy, plump, kindly people, who took Nancette under their kindly wings like two fussy, clucking old farmyard hens might take a forlorn chicken. Lady Bosistow was gracious and suave, and the advent

of tea drew us all together in a friendly circle.

But when they had all gone, and we were alone, the girl turned to me with a bewildered and half-terrified look.

'What does it all mean?' she said. 'I—I did not think Mr. Glendenning wanted anyone to know—I mean, that he wished me to be received as his wife. He will not like it, and in time, when the truth comes out——'

'What truth?' I asked. 'The truth that he has had the bad taste to leave you for a while? My dear, do not trouble about that. I have his own permission to release you from the ambiguous position you occupied here. It could not have lasted. It was a shame and scandal to you both.'

'It was my own fault,' she said bitterly, 'and I fail to see how the acknowledgment of my marriage improves my position.'

'But I do,' I answered confidently. 'You are so young and so unworldly! Why, you are little better than a child! Let me give

you the benefit of my superior knowledge. There is no earthly reason for you to hide your head under a load of shame and suspicion; still less to place yourself in a false position, and live on here as Errol Glendenning's unacknowledged wife. Nothing can alter the fact that you *are* his wife. It is madness to suppose it. It is a logical deduction, arrived at by the knowledge of certain conditions leading to results. No good can be obtained by letting the outside world into the secrets of your inner life. I am judging this case as you cannot judge it, and I am a woman like yourself. I hope you trust me sufficiently to feel sure I would not advise you to do anything injudicious or unwise?'

She looked at me steadily for a minute or two with her clear, beautiful eyes.

'I think,' she said, half turning away, 'that it is a thousand pities Errol Glendenning did not marry—you.'

The remark was so unlooked-for and so extraordinary that for a moment I seemed

fairly to lose my breath. Then the colour rushed in a hot wave all over my face.

'Nonsense!' I said sharply. 'Such an idea never entered his head. In marriage it is always "like to unlike," you know. That is the irresistible law of attraction; you can't argue against it.'

'I have no wish to argue against it,' she said wearily. 'It is too late; but it was a terrible mistake—a terrible mistake!'

'Tell me,' I said presently, when voice and face were once more under control; 'tell me, are you not beginning to forget a little? He has made no sign. Your refusal that day made it all look final. Does that fact not give you resignation?'

'I am trying my best to forget,' she said simply. 'It is my daily task. But it is not easy. I try to school my heart—to hold it down. I know that—that time is over for ever. Nothing could bring it back; nothing could make me as I was that day by the sea. But the effort makes me cold to everything. The spring seems all gone out

of my life. I shut my eyes against his presence, but I can't shut my heart against recollection. It still comes at times.'

'That,' I said, 'is to be expected, but it will be less frequent and less painful. Believe me, it will. Duty seems a hard and unlovely thing, but if we follow it we are repaid in the end.'

'Ah,' she said bitterly, 'it is so easy to talk! I feel strong because I am untempted; but if he crosses my path again, if he looks at me with those sad eyes that hold so much unhappiness——'

'I don't believe he is unhappy,' I said restively. 'I am sure he is not. I have no doubt if you could see him now you would be thoroughly disillusioned. He is probably eating, and drinking, and dancing, and gambling, and entering into all the frivolous pleasures of Parisian life, as if no thought of you had ever troubled his reason—I won't say his heart. Frenchmen have passion, and sentiment, and vanity. I don't think love

is ever more to them than an episode, calling one or all of these emotions into play.'

'You are prejudiced,' she said with a faint smile.

'On the contrary,' I said quickly, 'I am impartial. If I were not I could not reason.'

'If you loved,' she said sadly, 'you would not care to do—that.'

'I might care,' I said quietly. 'But I know very well I should not be able to.' Then I laughed. 'Can you fancy,' I said, 'Miss Tresyllian a slave to the tender passion? Poor thing! I wonder if she is sufficiently feminine for sentiment or emotion?'

'She is very metallic, I think,' said Nancette.

'That,' I said, 'expresses her exactly. You will have to undergo the ordeal of returning all these calls next week.'

'Oh,' she said with a shiver, 'how dreadful! Must I really?'

'You must,' I said with vigour, 'if you

wish to be a social success. The entertaining will come later on.'

'And do people really like this sort of life?' she asked anxiously.

'Apparently,' I said. 'Some ambitions have no wider boundary than admission to a certain "set"—invitations to a particular house, or the reputation of giving the best dinners in their special circle. It seems odd, and poor, and a sad waste of time to other people whose views are broader, whose experiences are wider, and to whom life has a great and serious aspect.'

'I don't think I should like that sort of life,' she said gravely. 'Does it also come under the head of duty?'

'It may be a pleasure to you one day,' I answered; 'there is no saying how your tastes may develop now the "squiresses" have taken you up.'

'Why have you not become like them?' she asked suddenly; 'you have lived among them long enough.'

'Oh,' I said, laughing gaily, 'you forget I

have been in the land of freedom and enlarged views of woman's rights. That makes all the difference.'

'If it has made you what you are,' she said simply, 'I am glad of it.'

CHAPTER VI.

There cannot be much to chronicle in the life of two women living in a dull country neighbourhood, where the routine of each day is almost unvaried. We have drifted on a year further since I began my journal. Basil's letters and the holidays were almost the only things that roused or amused us. Yet I think Nancette is certainly better in health, and more tranquil in spirits; perhaps this restful pause in her life has done her good. She never voluntarily mentions Pierre de Volens's name now, but I am not sure, in my own mind, that that is altogether a good sign.

By aid of the coachman's and my instructions she has learnt to ride, and she and I go out early in these warm, bright mornings,

and scour the country for miles round. We never meet or see anyone but the farm-labourers or the cottagers.

Having returned the county's visits, we had done as much as was necessary. To accept invitations was as impossible as to give any, until such time as Errol Glendenning chose to put matters on a different footing.

I have not heard from him since he went to Terzia. I scarcely think he would have stayed there during the hot summer following his letter. But he never writes.

It is now June. The woods are darkly green, the lawns and hedgerows full of deep and lovely colours, of wild roses and honeysuckle. The sea is no longer stormy and gray as I catch sight of it sometimes from some high inland point, but blue and clear, with gently heaving swell, and faint lines of foam that fringe the shingle or the low-lying rocks.

Nancette can look at it now without flinching, but we do not ever go near the cliffs. I think sometimes that the day she

agrees to do that will be a day when she has scored a great victory over herself.

Most of the great folks have gone to London for the season. The good old doctor and his sister trot over occasionally to see us, but Mrs. Tresyllian and her daughter concluded long ago that we were not desirable acquaintances. They never paid us a second visit.

'There is one good thing about us,' I remark casually to Nancette; 'we don't bore each other, trying as our position is. It is trying, you must acknowledge.'

'If you were bored,' she said, 'I am afraid you would be too polite to tell me.'

'I should not, indeed,' I answered. 'Plain-speaking is my strong point, I assure you; I should find it terribly hard to say anything I did not feel, or think, or mean.'

'But you can show consideration,' she said.

And something in her uplifted eyes touched my heart very deeply.

'That,' I said, as lightly as my feelings would let me, 'is not so much a merit as the outcome of the natural restrictions of civilized life.'

She looked at me a moment, then suddenly a rush of colour came over her face. She clasped her hands round my arm.

'Tell me,' she said, 'do you think it would be possible to go away from here for a little while? I feel—oh, don't think me foolish—but I feel sometimes a sort of horror of the place. It is not that it is dull, or dreary, or desolate, but it seems haunted by so many memories, and full of so much reproach. I feel as if I had been long, long years in it. If, when the boys come this time, we might all go away—I don't mind where—only out of this—away from here!'

I looked at her, amazed. All her self-control was broken down. She was trembling like a leaf.

'There is no reason why you should not go away,' I answered soothingly. 'It might have occurred to me before. There are lots

of pretty places along the coast——' Then I stopped abruptly. 'But you don't like the sea?' I said.

'I want to hear the voices of my own land,' she cried passionately. 'The longing is like a sickness that devours me. I want to look on faces that are not set, and stiff, and prim as these English faces here. Oh, Myra, you don't know what it is.'

'I think I do,' I said gently. 'I felt like that myself—once. I was in America then.'

She dropped my arm and stood there perfectly still.

'You always understand me,' she said. 'Tell me, can it be done?'

'I think it might,' I answered, after a moment's reflection. 'We do not know where Mr. Glendenning is, so we cannot ask his permission. But I don't see why he should object. Where do you wish to go?'

'Do you know the Channel Islands?' she asked. 'I went to Guernsey when I was at school; I often think I should like to go

there again. It is all so French there, and yet so quiet, and so pretty, and quaint.'

'It is only a dot of granite,' I said, smiling. 'No; I have never been there. By all means let us go. But,' looking at her gravely, 'I hope it will be safe? No chance of meeting *someone* there?'

She flushed as red as a June rose.

'If there were,' she said, 'I would not have asked this of you. Nothing is farther from my wishes than such a meeting. Can't you believe it?'

'Nearly two years,' I said, 'and no word —no sign.'

'No,' she said steadily. 'How wisely you judged him!'

'And in another year and a half,' I said, 'your penance will be over. Errol Glendenning must come back then.'

She grew very pale.

'He will never forgive,' she said. 'I could not expect it. I have had ample time to think the subject over. It looks even worse than it did at first. I sometimes hope,

for his sake, that he may be able to set me free.'

'You should not wish that,' I answered. 'You don't know what a terrible stigma it would leave upon your life. Marriage is not a thing to be lightly set aside.'

'Or lightly entered upon,' she said wearily. 'Oh, if I had only thought—only known; but all the regrets in the world won't alter things now.'

'No,' I said; 'that is what I am always telling you. But it may yet lie in your power to alter the course of both the lives that now look so hopeless and so sad. Reparation is possible.'

She sighed.

'Sometimes I think I am cured,' she said. 'It all looks so senseless, so foolish. If I could go back, and take my life up and begin all over again from—from that time, I do not think I should be here alone, and my husband banished.'

'My dear,' I said joyfully, 'that is a charming confession. I wish your husband were

here to have heard it. Not,' I added gravely, 'that he deserves such a reward. I consider he has acted very injudiciously, and neglected you most unpardonably.'

'No,' she said; 'I deserved it all. Remember, you don't know all the story yet.'

'Shall I ever know it?' I asked somewhat anxiously, as I looked at the young sad face, so grave, and fair, and colourless.

'You shall know it,' she said, 'on the day that sees me reconciled to my husband, and cured for ever of the folly that has made shipwreck of both our lives.'

'I shall be content to wait,' I answered. 'And all shipwrecks are not fatal, even though disastrous.'

The following day the boys came home.

It was always delightful to have them back. They were so full of life, health, spirits, they seemed to animate the whole place, to sweep like a very whirlwind through its quiet and repose, and dusty, unwholesome desolation.

Basil had grown very tall, and handsomer than ever.

'Stringy beef and beetles have not injured your looks,' I said to him, as we all sat out on the lawn that afternoon, drinking tea and eating Deborah's home-made cakes, 'nor Stewart's either. He looks much more robust than he did last term.'

'Would you both mind spending your holidays away from here?' asked Nancette rather timidly. 'I want to go away for a change, but I would not leave unless you came also.'

'Mind!' shouted Basil. 'Good gracious! We should be delighted! Where do you want to go?'

'To the Channel Islands,' I said.

'Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, and Sark,' quoted Stewart. 'How jolly! How do we get there?'

'By sea, of course, duffer!' laughed Basil. 'No wonder you are the bottom of the class for geography!'

'And so are you for mathematics,' returned Stewart with brotherly frankness.

'Oh, hang mathematics! We won't talk of them now,' exclaimed Basil impetuously. 'Guernsey is a better subject. When do we go, Lady Nancye?'

'As soon as we can,' she answered. 'We can start to-morrow if Mrs. Freere likes.'

'Mrs. Freere is quite willing,' I answered. 'We can go up to London to-morrow, make a few necessary purchases—our wardrobes, my dear Nancette, are very unfashionable—and start on Thursday for Guernsey. I may remark, *en parenthèse*, that it will be very hot there.'

'I love heat!' exclaimed the girl.

Her face looked animated—almost happy. I had never seen her look so brilliant.

'And so do I,' said Basil. 'Can we go about in flannels and straw-hats? I shall do lots of boating there.'

'Isn't it Guernsey that the old Beetle goes to?' asked Stewart suddenly. 'I'm sure it is. Don't you remember he told us about

his granddaughter Léonie—the clever one—said she was a better scholar than himself?'

'Yes, I believe it is Guernsey he goes to,' said Basil. 'What a lark! Won't he be astonished to see us!'

'Is Guernsey really an island?' asked Stewart. 'Water all round, I mean. I know they say England is one, but I never can believe it. There seems too much land about it, somehow. My idea of an island is to stand somewhere about the middle of it, you know, and see the water all round you.'

'We'll get a few of the inhabitants of Guernsey to chuck some cartloads of stone into a heap as near the middle of the island as possible,' said Basil; 'then you'll be able to see the water if you stand on the pile. I know it's very small—so small that it's confidently expected the water will sweep all over it one day, and the place that knows it shall know it no more.'

'Don't be profane,' I said rebukingly.

'I think,' said Stewart, rising, 'I'll go and study the map.'

'Do,' said his brother encouragingly; 'and just mark the spot where you'd like that stone-heap. It will be a guide for us when we get there.'

The bare thought of change and movement in our quiet stagnant life was enough to excite us all. That evening sufficed for packing and arrangements. Old Deborah seemed amazed at the idea of our flight, but gradually sobered down, and accepted it as inevitable.

We took no maid with us, nor did we burden ourselves with superfluous luggage. I was an experienced enough traveller to know the disadvantages of that proceeding.

Early the next day we were off to London. Our purchases, which consisted mainly of a few cool cambrics, and ribbons, and straw-hats, were soon concluded. The next night we were crossing the blue waters of the Channel, and after a ten hours' passage we found ourselves tired and safe in the best hotel in Guernsey.

We had determined to rent a small house

(if we could find one) for a couple of months, and the first two days of our stay were spent in searching for a domicile.

We succeeded at last in discovering a small, pretty cottage with a straggling, unkept garden that was a delicious wilderness of roses, heliotrope, and carnations. From every window, and from the wide, creeper-festooned veranda, one could see the dazzling diamond-like glitter of the sea, sweeping away to the rim of the hazy blue horizon.

A huge cedar-tree fronted the house, and shaded what should have been the lawn. The golden sunshine, the scents of the flowers, the deep shades of the old gnarled trees, and the far-reaching blue sweep of water, made a picture altogether delightful after the gloom of Owl's Roost.

Nancette was enchanted. So were the boys. So was I in a sober, well-advised fashion. I engaged the cottage, and two French servants, had our boxes sent over from the hotel, and then we settled ourselves comfortably to enjoy Guernsey.

CHAPTER VII.

'It is the Beetle himself,' said Basil.

We were all sitting on one of the points of the Guernsey cliffs enjoying the sunset when he made this remark. Heaven knows how we had come there! By some tortuous and ingenious method best known to the boys, but not calculated to improve either our dresses, or appearance.

A cool, delicious breeze was blowing over the sea. The sky and air were crisp, clear tints of blue and gold. Faint wafts of hay and clover scents reached us from far-off fields; low, melodious notes of birds fell across the stillness.

I felt thrilled to the heart's core with keen physical delight. The scene, and the air, the colour, and warmth, seemed to bring

back youth, and hope, and fair dreams, and all sorts of sweet far-reaching possibilities.

When Basil's voice broke across the stillness it jarred on me. But I followed his glance. I saw a small elderly man standing on the edge of the cliffs some short distance off. Beside him was a small childish figure in a dress of blue and red cotton. She had taken off her hat, and was swinging it in her hand. Her dark hair was simply plaited in one long plait down her back. Neither of them was speaking. They stood quite still watching the sunset.

'I'll go and speak to him,' said Stewart.

'Don't startle him too suddenly, or Léonie will be an orphan,' said Basil with thoughtful consideration. 'He's rather rickety on his pins, and he's just about as near the edge of the cliffs as he can go in safety.'

Thus cautioned, Stewart slowly advanced. We watched him lazily. Before he had reached the old gentleman, a shrill little voice broke out in explanation:

'*Mais, dîtes donc. Il y un petit m'sieu. Mon père, entendez-vous?*'

The old man turned round; blank amazement was written on his face.

'*Mais pas possible, mon élève! Ici!*'

'Now, listen to Stewart's French,' whispered Basil. 'It's lovely.'

'Yes, monsur,' said Stewart, very slowly and distinctly. '*Nous sommes à Guernsey vrayment. Nous sommes arrivay* — there are two *jours* since our *arrivay. Mademoiselle est — est votre grande fille; n'est-ce pas?*'

'*Mais oui,*' said the old man beamingly; and then considerately lapsing into English, he went on: 'My grandchild—my little girl —of whom I have spoke, she lives here with her *grandmère* what time I away am in England. And you stay here for the holiday? And *m'sieu* your brother, do I behold him also?'

'Yes; he is with those ladies,' said Stewart, nodding in our direction.

'May I be honoured?' asked the old man

politely, as he took off his hat and advanced towards us.

Basil rose to greet him, and Nancette and I did the same. In another moment she was talking fluently and unrestrainedly to him in her native tongue, while the boys amused themselves by taking stock of Mdlle. Léonie. She was a rather slim, ugly child; she might have been any age from twelve to sixteen. Her eyes were dark and large, but too brilliant and restless to be beautiful. She had a keen, clever face, but not a prepossessing one.

'Can you speak any English at all?' asked Stewart bashfully, 'because I—*je ne sais pas beaucoup le Français.*'

She nodded in a quick marmoset fashion peculiar to her.

'Yes,' she said. 'I know it—some. There are plenty English people here. My idioms are not good, perhaps, but I understand, and I know many words for conversation.'

'That's all right,' said Basil. 'It's very

hard to keep on talking long in a foreign tongue.'

Then we all sat down once more and conversation became general. We learnt a great deal about the island from the little girl. She seemed familiar with every part of it.

'I have lived here all my life,' she said. 'I wish I could go away to some big city. Perhaps I shall some day.'

'No doubt,' I answered. 'But "all your life" is not a very long span as yet?'

'I am sixteen,' she said gravely.

'And do you really know Greek, and Latin, and mathematics, and all those dry old things, as your grandfather said you did?' asked Basil, regarding her with unfeigned wonder.

'*Mais oui.* It is not so strange, is it? I like to learn. I wish I were a man. I would go to college then, and become a great *professeur.* That is my ambition. *Mais hélas!* it is not possible.'

'I don't see what women want to be

learned for,' said Basil. 'They ought to be content to be pretty and agreeable, not stuffed with dry and useless sciences.'

'Dry! Useless!' Her eyes flashed like sparks. 'Ah, what do you know? You are but an idle English schoolboy. I know your type. The *pauvre grandpère*, he tells me when he comes back for the holidays what a life it is you lead him! You only think to "shirk work"—that is your English slang—not do it. I—oh, I have never enough to do!'

'Haven't you?' said Basil in surprise. 'By Jove! what a rum idea! I wish you'd do some of mine.'

The small fury regarded him with supreme contempt.

'What will you do with your life, your future, *mon petit m'sieu?*' she asked scornfully. 'You will have to think of that. The battle is not always to the strong, though you think so.'

'My ideas on that subject are of the vaguest,' laughed Basil. 'I should like to be

a great hunter or explorer. One doesn't need book-learning for that—certainly not classics or mathematics.'

'You would want to know the science and laws of measurement even if you were an explorer,' said the girl decidedly. 'How can you talk such *bêtise?*'

'What a little termagant you are!' said the boy coolly. 'You pitch into me worse than Mrs. Freere does.'

Her eyes turned to me in a half-apology.

'Am I not right, madame?' she said. 'Is it not a sin to be idle, and to waste opportunities?'

'Most decidedly,' I answered; 'and one can never know too much. I agree with you there. It must be satisfactory to work up to the highest improvable point if you have an ambition.'

'All lives should have that,' she said decidedly.

'Well, I have told you mine,' laughed Basil. 'We can't all have the same. It would be a waste of money to send me to

college. Now you, mademoiselle, would appreciate it. So will Stewart. He wants to be a clergyman. I—oh, give me life, air, space, liberty—better things than books, any day.'

'Do you think so?' she asked with evident contempt. 'That is the opinion of the animal world also.'

Basil coloured.

'Then it shows their wisdom,' he said, rising, and marching off to the edge of the cliff.

The girl turned to Stewart.

'And so you want to be a clergyman,' she said. 'I have often wondered what an English clergyman was like.'

The *naïveté* of the speech and her grave, intent survey of the boy were delicious. I laughed outright.

'My dear,' I said, 'Stewart will probably change his mind a dozen times before he decides on a career. A boy's nature matures more slowly than a girl's. Haven't you discovered that?'

'I do not know any boys,' she said. 'I have

only old people as acquaintances, and one or two priests. *Grandmère* does not visit or entertain ; she says she is too old.'

'Your life must be awfully dull,' said Stewart compassionately.

'I have my books,' she said gravely. 'I am never dull with them.'

A little stir, a sudden exclamation, made me look round here. I saw that Nancette was very pale and agitated. I rose quickly and went over to her side.

'Are you ill? What is it?' I asked hurriedly.

'Madame is fatigued—she is faint,' said the old Frenchman with deep concern. 'The walk has been too long for her.'

'No, it is nothing. I am quite well,' said Nancette.

The colour came back to her face and lips. She smiled at my anxious looks, then rose to her feet and took my arm.

'I think we ought to be returning,' she said. 'See, the sun has set, and it is a long walk.'

The old Frenchman turned away to call his granddaughter and the boys. For a moment Nancette and I were alone and out of earshot.

'What was it?' I asked her anxiously.

'Do you remember,' she said, 'in one of Basil's letters that he said "St. Jean" was not his French master's real name?'

'Yes; has he told you it?'

'He has told me enough,' she said. 'I am sure—I am convinced—that he is Pierre de Volens's father.'

'Good heavens?' I cried; 'and the child?'

She shuddered, and turned pale.

'I do not know,' she said hoarsely; 'I *dared* not ask.'

END OF VOL. I.

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